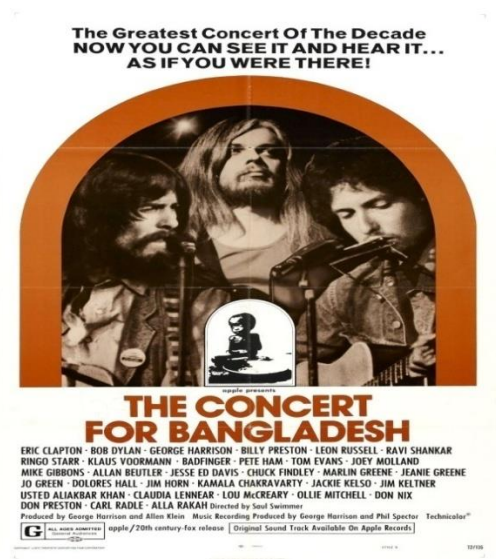


A compendium of Bangladesh references in Western media/pop culture



COVER PICTURES

[From top left corner clockwise]

Film poster of the Concert for Bangladesh

*A Bangladesh cricket ('the Tigers') supporter on roller blades*¹

*Matt Groening drawing of Mohammad Yunus from Simpsons episode no. 466*²

*Rickshaws in Dhaka (image by Michael Stout)*³

Brick Lane by Monica Ali, paperback cover

*Made in Bangladesh T-shirt*⁴

*Bamboo bridge in Bangladesh, National Geographic*⁵

NOTICE

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¹ <http://en.goldenmap.com/Bangladesh%20national%20cricket%20team>

² Simpsons 'Loan-A Lisa' episode 466 – Season 22, no. 2 (2010) featuring Mohammad Yunus as himself
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1628659/>

³ <http://mrstoutsblog.blogspot.com/2009/08/dhaka-city-scenes.html>

⁴ http://rlv.zcache.com/made_in_bangladesh_tshirt-p235289302560935572trlf_400.jpg

⁵ http://images.nationalgeographic.com/wpf/media-live/photos/000/035/cache/bamboo-bridge-bangladesh_3589_990x742.jpg

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INTRODUCTION - WHY COMPILE THIS (AND WHY IT DOESN'T MATTER ANYMORE)

What does Bangladesh mean to the average person living in the West?

This is of course an impossible question to answer as individuals vary widely. In the last ten years, I've met strangers in London whose ancestry goes back centuries within range of the Bow Bells and whose travels rarely extend beyond Spain, who have had an appreciative and labyrinthine knowledge of Bangladeshi culture and dialects osmotically gleaned from Sylheti neighbours whilst I have also met regular business travellers to Bangladesh who would have trouble naming more than one city there, let alone any significant historical or cultural figures.

Nonetheless the images on the front cover convey a fair spread of memes and themes associated with Bangladesh in the (Anglophone) West – *from that influential charity concert and consequent associations with poverty, floods, war and NGOs... to the spread of microcredit popularised by global development icon Mohammed Yunus ... with a growing export trade now associating Bangladesh with garments (or re-associating as pre-colonial Bengal was much famed for Dacca muslins and textiles)...to Brick Lane - not just the novel, but the place in the East End of London with its associations with immigration and the British love of curry...to rural scenes of rivers (and floods)... plus more generic South Asian sub-continental stereotypes of cricket and rickshaws...*

In compiling a compendium on Bangladesh references in popular Western culture, one cuts across a lot of serious themes and topics which are inevitably reflected in the links that follow. However, this is distinctly not an academic treatise of the history, politics and culture of Bangladesh; there is an ever increasing amount of material available for historians, investors, travellers and the simply curious to track down - *and compare and contrast the reliability of* – available online. Instead as can be gathered *from the various items of trivia logged within, the initial inspiration for this compendium was more to capture the fleeting and the trivial.* Hence this is an idiosyncratic list reflecting on my own age and experience and does not purport to be comprehensive.

So why compile this then? Well anybody who has ever been on a long overseas holiday will know that news from - or references to- their homeland in the local media can carry a special weight of its own. *Particularly* if you are from somewhere that doesn't get the type of global media exposure as say Middle Eastern wars, British royals or the Oscars achieve without missing a beat. *And even more so* if you are a long term immigrant living in the West who is also a visible ethnic minority and whose ancestral home is traditionally a poorer, less powerful or less globally visible nation.

Hence, as someone of Bangladeshi heritage growing up in the UK during the 1970s, my parents and I would be highly conscious of any references to Bangladesh in the British media. *The very rareness, novelty (not to mention pride or embarrassment factors) of such references is the reason they were noted at the time and are recalled today.*

Nowadays when the internet and satellite television give direct access all around the world to news and entertainment channels from Bangladesh, the idea of this type of compendium may sound faintly ridiculous to younger people. But it wasn't that long ago

that fax machines were a novelty and the founders of Google were in primary school. And if you're old enough you will also recall that international phone calls sometimes required days of patient waiting (and much expense) to book a spare line....

.....The world certainly seemed a much bigger place back and indeed shops and cities *were* actually more likely to be vastly different to each other. So the inspiration for this compendium is most of all a function of my upbringing, memory and age - which is old enough to recall when references to a far-away place used to have a lot more impact.

Stories to tell...

Yet today in 2013 with Bangladesh in turmoil enduring one of its periodic bouts of political strife as major issues such as accountability for war crimes are hotly debated, it remains the case that the nation has a relatively low profile globally. At the most basic level for instance foreign newspapers will be more likely to print currency exchange rates for Sri Lanka and the Maldives which have but a fraction of Bangladesh's population as they attract more foreign tourists.

Whereas the world will sometimes take an interest when horrendous factory fires occur in places where leading brands may source clothes (<http://www.laborrights.org/news/coverage-of-the-tarzeen-fire>), much of Bangladesh's often very interesting news stories are only noticed abroad by the Bangladeshi diaspora and those with a professional interest.

This relatively low profile is all the more enigmatic given that there is a large diaspora of people of Bangladeshi origin⁶ interacting with people all around the world⁷ and that Bangladesh has many tales to tell. As one of the top 10 most populated countries in the world with 160m people living in the world's most densely populated (non-City) state, Bangladesh is not short of interesting issues....

Bangladesh is at the hub of many of the key issues facing the world.⁸

Climate change, Ethical Trade, Corporate responsibility and Labour rights are just a few of the topics where it really matters exactly how these issues are dealt with and/or impact on people in Bangladesh. If these problems can be dealt with adequately here, then they should be able to be dealt with properly anywhere.... which would be genuine cause for optimism in seeing improvements to peoples lives around the world via **responsible globalisation**. *Corruption and political dysfunction* remain major challenges for Bangladesh (as it does for many countries) along with other wider debates with global resonance such as *Secular v Religious identities, terrorism and human rights*.

Fighting poverty and gender inequality and reducing rates of population growth are areas where the nation has made enough meaningful progress to earn praise from Amartya Sen for improvements against HDI measures and *Millennium Development Goals* since independence in 1971.

The popularisation of microcredit is the best known export from the giants of its successful NGO sector — Grameen and BRAC (although perhaps these should be better known now for helping to popularise technological innovations in improving payments by mobile phone and facilitating the flow of *remittances* from diaspora communities abroad. Arguably though the social gains arising out of industrialisation (from for example bringing millions of underemployed women workers into the formal economy) - as the country has become one of the world's leading exporters of Ready Made Garments – *are more important in the long run?* (Even with its attendant sweatshops and the barriers remaining to be overcome in order to ensure safety and to provide decent working conditions and wages for all – see <http://ethicalbit.wordpress.com/labour-standards/>)

⁶ Whose travels and dispersal goes back longer than some might imagine and makes for very interesting immigration histories – see especially **Across Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers: Life Stories of Pioneer Sylheti Settlers in Britain** Carolone Adams (1987)_ISBN 13: 9780906698143 and Rachel Lowenstein's **On Brick Lane** <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2007/aug/19/historybooks.features> and www.bengaliharlem.com

⁷ Including in the case of structural engineer the late Fazlur Khan, designing what for many years was the world's tallest skyscraper in Chicago – the Willis (nee Sears) Tower http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fazlur_Khan

⁸ <http://niazalam.wordpress.com/bangladesh/>

(Bangladesh)is often cited as a example of an emerging democracy with a majority Muslim population. Despite long experience of military rule, it has been more successful than its neighbours in limiting defence expenditure as a proportion of GDP and has actively discouraged proliferation of nuclear weapons. In addition to success in fields such as microcredit, Bangladesh has made positive contributions to international forums including supplying peacekeeping troops to United Nations programmes in Bosnia and Sierra Leone.

By setting up the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) its diplomats have encouraged the key, if as yet underused forum for multilateral collaboration in an area fraught with regional conflict. Yet, it is also true that for one of the most populated countries in the world, Bangladesh overall has a low global profile, which is ironic, given the very high level of international interest during its war of independence. Like other poor countries not on the tourist or sporting trail Bangladesh tends to figure in the Western media consciousness only during times of natural disaster, yet as this paper has noted it is not without significant success stories.

Failure to excite a higher level of international interest is enhanced by a number of factors, not least of which is the political domination of the South Asian region by the India-Pakistan conflict. Added to this is the often inward looking nature of Bangladesh's political culture, which has tended to show a lack of media awareness and placed little value on projecting the nation to the world at large.

The underlying reasons for 'failures of projection' relate to key questions of identity and national self image that are a major preoccupation for Bangladeshis. However, understanding this background alone will not help to quickly increase international interest or to challenge incorrect historical stereotypes and perceptions. In practice this is only likely to come with time and greater international interaction through growing trade or cultural influence.

From a response to a DFID White Paper 2 January 2003.⁹

Ironically, in the early days of its independence, Bangladesh was actually very high in the global media consciousness. The bloody nature of the Bangladesh Independence war in 1971 which cut across Cold War alliances, briefly made the new state the world's biggest news story (at a time of huge historical competition for the news agenda – Moon landings at c.6 month intervals, the American war on Vietnam and the lead up to Watergate) – initially creating plenty of goodwill for the new country and making an icon of its first leader Sheikh Mujib, before rapidly tailing off the agenda.

Reverberations from that time – for instance in the association of Bangladesh with images of war, poverty and the legendary Concert staged by George Harrison, especially among people of a certain age in the US who will never let the 1960s and its aftermath go – are still felt today – and in part this compendium seeks to acknowledge such cultural impacts.

It also reflects on the relatively low profile that Bangladesh has largely had ever since the mid 1970s in the West. References in UK television programmes for example are still sufficiently rare for British Bangladeshis¹⁰ to notice whenever a leading BBC figure such as Andrew Marr chooses to make a documentary there. I mention the above renowned journalist and documentary maker here because of an amusing vignette from his stay in a Dhaka slum during his three part *Megacities*¹¹ series first broadcast in 2011.

⁹ http://www.bricklanecircle.org/uploads/IDG_DFID_Bangladesh_paper_1_.pdf

¹⁰ Who are of course an interesting but distinct topic all of their own and fast evolving – see BB list – and forever associated with the Great British love of curry and the *Banglatown* community historically centred around Brick Lane in East London BB List <http://trialbyjeory.wordpress.com/2013/01/28/abdul-ullah-and-his-new-power-list-of-british-bangladeshis/>

¹¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b011ql6k> and <http://www.guardian.co.uk/tv-and-radio/2011/jun/02/andrew-marr-megacities-tv-review>

Now the sight of any rich and privileged person literally 'slumming it' by spending a night in a Dhaka *bustee* could be a scenario fraught with possibility for offence to liberal sensitivities, but as a consummate professional Marr handled this sequence extremely well – and the episode is certainly worth watching; memorably, he not only made friends with various locals but the mother of one of the programmes subjects conferred the (somewhat jug eared) presenter with the moniker *Mr Bean*¹².

In an age where it is a commonplace that football fans the world over (even in the United States) will fanatically follow live coverage of *El Clasico* and the *English Premier League* at odd hours of the day or night, the significance of this simple joke may have been lost on younger viewers; For it was only in 1975 that NASA and the Indian Space Research Organisation in the SITE¹³ programme first beamed educational television pictures into villages in rural India where hundreds of people enthusiastically shared their **one and only tv set...**

The march of communications technology ever since exceeds even the enthusiastic lobbying of the likes of SITE advocate Arthur C Clarke during the seventies for more such experiments. (Amongst other things whilst he was at this, he predicted that satellites would help break down borders, censorship and dictators ¹⁴)

No doubt the common humanity of the tv presenter and the slumdweller would have allowed them to share a joke even without the march of mobile phones and television among the world's poor, but their easily understood shared reference to the British tv character was a significant reflection on the 21st century *reach* of technology *as well as* on the universality of that type of comedy.

Whilst this compendium is primarily a list of references to *images of Bangladesh in the West*, this does not mean there is no reason not to equally celebrate the sharing of *images from the West in Bangladesh*. (Unless you are inclined to indulge in xenophobia, small mindedness or paranoia about cultural imperialism.)

After all there is little point looking backwards without learning from the past or looking forward to a better future. Hopefully the links that follow may help to jog some memories and provide some food for thought.

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April 2013

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www.niazalam.wordpress.com

¹² <http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/showbiz/tv/3611248/Lug-out-Andrew-Marr-is-Mr-Bean.html>

¹³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satellite_Instructional_Television_Experiment

¹⁴ And that the *information pollution* that he predicted would inevitably follow from the insatiable human need for communication and information, was a *far more preferable* state for the world's poor to the alternative of *information starvation*

¹⁵ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bengali_calendar and *India through its calendars* Amartya Sen (2000) <http://www.littlemag.com/2000/sen2.htm>

THE OBVIOUS – CONCERT(S) FOR BANGLADESH

“By arranging a then unprecedented charity rock concert for Bangladesh at Madison Square Garden in New York on 1 August 1971, George Harrison did much to raise the profile of the Bangladesh liberation movement around the world, during a crucial period of the 1971 Independence War.”¹⁶

*To this day, the Concert for Bangladesh is considered a landmark event in rock music history and is frequently cited as the inspiration for all subsequent rock benefit concerts in particular Band Aid, Live Aid and Artists Against Apartheid. Such concerts are not without their critics, sometimes with good cause as in the case of 2005's Live 8 Concert for Africa which was much criticized for not supporting African artists. By showcasing Ravi Shankar and Ali Akbar Khan as the opening act, the Concert for Bangladesh at least overcame this type of error. Famously, George Harrison was inspired to stage the concert after Ravi Shankar had approached him with a suggestion that he hoped could raise twenty thousand dollars for refugees fleeing the war in Bangladesh following the Pakistani military clampdown of March 1971. Horrified by the reports of massacres and Shankar's personal anguish over relatives fleeing across the border into India, Harrison immediately wrote a best selling single entitled *Bangla Desh*, which starts with:*

*“My friend came to me
With sadness in his eyes,
He told me that he wanted help
Before his country died.
Although I couldn't feel the pain
I knew I'd have to try
Now I'm asking all of you
To help us save some lives”*

This theme of friendship is highly significant. Asked at a press conference about contemporary causes such as Biafra and Vietnam, Harrison noted that the West habitually ignores suffering in the Third World all the time and acknowledges that concerts like this should happen more often but it was because “a friend asked me” that he was inspired to commit so much effort to the Bangladesh cause. Even though this type of multiple superstar concert had not taken place before, Harrison, inspired by his Beatles experience to think big, set up the Concert for Bangladesh from scratch. The two concerts on 1 August 1971 were highly successful - with a cheque for US\$243 418.50 being immediately sent to UNICEF. Sadly, both the UK and US governments held up much of the subsequent fifteen million dollars generated by the best selling Grammy award winning concert album and film for several years.

Yet the importance of the Concert in generating support for the Bangladesh liberation cause cannot be easily overestimated. Far from being an uncontroversial cause, like Bob Geldof's famine relief efforts in the 1980s, the hosting of the Concert for Bangladesh in New York, at a time when the Nixon administration was actively supporting the Pakistan military regime, (to prevent Bangladeshi independence) was a politically significant act as well as humanitarian gesture. Harrison himself acknowledged as much when writing his memoirs in 1980, in which he says that he was glad to have shone a light on “*the Pakistani Hitler's*.”¹⁷

Extracted from a synopsis of the life of George Harrison in 'A friend in need is a friend in deed' - an Outstanding Services Award nomination for the Bangladeshi-American Convention <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/uttorshuri/message/4835>

¹⁶ Concert for Bangladesh DVD of the 1972 film directed by Saul Swimmer-
http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0158560/?ref=fn_al_tt_1 Album of the concert was originally released as a double LP in December 1971 produced by Harrison and Phil Spector, Apple records.

¹⁷ I ME MINE by George Harrison - Genesis publications (1980) Ganga Publishing Simon Schuster ISBN 0-671-42787-3

"Last year on our 40th independence anniversary, we created this project for those who stood next to us in our war of liberation. While there was a humanitarian crisis, atrocities and the genocide of Hindu minorities, people sent their support from throughout the world, particularly from the United Kingdom and the cultural activists who organised the famous Concert for Bangladesh at Madison Square Gardens, the two concerts by George Harrison, Bob Dylan, and Ravi Shankar," said Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Muna Tasneem"

Bangladesh to honour Bob Dylan and George Harrison, Telegraph article 19 October 2012

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/bangladesh/9620324/Bangladesh-to-honour-Bob-Dylan-and-George-Harrison.html>

The *Concert for Bangladesh* is so well known and has such a 'long tail' in the collective cultural consciousness¹⁸ that its impact needs no introduction, which is why the preceding extracts focus on its political legacy.

It is always worth highlighting though that the concerts themselves¹⁹ were very much "*an artistic triumph, that perhaps more than Woodstock, forms a time capsule of late 60s and early 70s rock music, optimism and goodwill.*"

Latter day commemorations of Western artists who referenced the Bangladesh liberation within Bangladesh include many references to Joan Baez's song 'The Story of Bangladesh, which was prompted by press coverage of the massacre of students in the early stages of the 1971 conflict.'²⁰ Perhaps confused by her association with Bob Dylan, some websites mistakenly list her as an artist who performed at the Concert for Bangladesh. An artist who was present in the Madison Square Garden audience that night (and who was about as different in public image from the renowned folk singer and activist as you can get,) was US TV light entertainment figure Andy Williams, which just goes to show truth is always more interesting than fiction.²¹

Although less well remembered than the George Harrison concert perhaps because it was not officially recorded for a film and LP, was the September 1971 concert attended by tens of thousands at the Oval²² cricket ground in South London, headlined by The Who and The Faces in their Rod Stewart and Ronnie Wood heyday.

Not to mention the fact that earlier on 21 June 1971 (over a month before the famous New York concerts) thanks to high profile appeals by the likes of Oxfam and War on Want, an even more stellar cast of British legends namely "*John Lennon and Yoko Ono, along with Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, Jethro Tull, and T. Rex (among many others), [lent] their support to Edgar Broughton's, Save A Life, an appeal in aid of the East Pakistani refugees in Bangladesh, which is launched by the Daily Mirror newspaper in London.*"²³

It is perhaps only apt then that the contemporary Bangladeshi music scene appears to retain a distinct fondness for the guitarist milieu of 70s classic rock sounds....

¹⁸ <http://baltimorepostexaminer.com/george-harrison-still-a-hero-in-bangladesh/2012/04/24>

¹⁹ <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/concert-for-bangladesh-19720203>

²⁰ <http://www.joanbaez.com/Lyrics/bangladesh.html> © 1972 Chandos Music (ASCAP)

²¹ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/3669881/Gig-of-a-Lifetime-Andy-Williams-on-George-Harrisons-Concert-for-Bangladesh-New-York-1971.html> (Even stranger of course is the life of 'Wall of Sound' music producer Phil Spector who produced the *Concert for Bangladesh* album as well as various Beatle connected works in the 70s, who ended up being convicted of murder in California in 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/6984082.stm>)

²² <http://www.setlist.fm/setlist/the-who/1971/oval-cricket-ground-london-england-3d65ddb.html>

<http://www.ukrockfestivals.com/goodbye-summer-1971.html>

²³ <http://history2.absolutesewhere.net/June/june21.html> - Broughton though never famed musically himself has had a long career as a still going strong 60s/70s era activist <http://www.terrascope.co.uk/Features/EdgarBroughtonBandFeature.htm>

At a benefit for victims of Hurricane Katrina this weekend in Chicago, he plans to dust off "Southern Man"; in a tie with "Ohio" as his most overtly political, angry song.

"I haven't played 'Southern Man' in years but I'm going to play it because I think it makes sense today," he says. In the ballroom of Fortress Blair, Young's anger is plain.

"We shouldn't be fighting this war in Iraq," he says. "I don't understand why we're there. We're probably not going to win anything and we're making enemies faster than we can kill 'em." And, he says, nobody's asking the questions that make you think.

"I'd like to be a reporter for The New York Times or wherever and stand up and say: 'Mr President, you tell us we're in the process of liberating Iraq, and we've had this big disaster in New Orleans.

Bangladesh gave us \$20,000 and that's a big thing for them. So how about our brothers we've liberated in Iraq? Where's the money from them? You tell us we're liberating them so why don't they care? Why don't they support us?"

Young leans forward. "It's obvious to me that they don't support us 'cause they don't like us. But no one asks the questions..." Instead of government for the people, Young believes we are in a war being fought between two fundamentalist religious groups. "The ones we have in this country and the one in the mountains of Pakistan, or wherever they are."

But priority is not the war in Iraq ("war has been going on since the beginning of time so that's not unusual") rather what's going on with the environment. "For me it's the main story now," he says. "But the people running countries these days are only paying attention to commerce and politics. They don't see what's going on right in front of them."

In Young's grandfather's and great-grandfather's time there were still buffalo on the plains of Manitoba; on his father's farm the sun would be blocked out by migrating Canada geese overhead. "It was awesome. But now we don't have that."

*A not untypical stream of consciousness interview(as anyone who has seen his journals will attest)
from 1970s rock legend and Grunge godfather Neil Young
Independent 22 September 2005*

<http://forums.canadiancontent.net/movies-music-books/40066-neil-young-interview.html>

.....*And according to Wikipedia **

Shondrae Crawford, better known by his stage names Bangladesh and Mr Bangladesh is a Grammy award winning American record producer born in Iowa. In respect to his name, he's said he chose the name because he describes his keyboard-centric production style as "Bangladesh":

"It's just Bangladesh. It's foreign to the ears."^{[[wiki link](#)]}

(* Don't panic, I've never heard of him either)

OF BEATLES, FLOODS, POVERTY, POPULATION AND COMEDIC STEREOTYPES

I have not quite gotten over with what Roseanne Barr had to say about Bangladesh. While doing one of her stand-up comics in front of a studio audience, America's most profane--and perhaps most overweight TV actress--once said, the best formula for weight loss is 'to spend a few weeks in Bangladesh'. On the other hand, Roseanne's comment is not particularly surprising. This image of Bangladesh, once described by a former US Secretary of State as a 'bottomless basket', and since repeated countless times by the Western media, is now written in stone.....

~ S.G. Hasan, a writer for Dhaka's daily *Bhorer Kagoj* in *Himal* (South Asia magazine,) August 1996.²⁴

To the annoyance of some Bangladeshis such as the writer above, one of the consequences of the Concert for Bangladesh is the persistent association of Bangladesh with images of disaster, poverty and the legendary Concert, particularly in the US. (His complaint also contains the phrase 'bottomless basket,' a Bengali translation of the infamous 'basketcase' remark attributed to Henry Kissinger, of which more later.)

Unsurprisingly given the age of Simpsons' creator Matt Groening and his fondness for 1970s references, the Concert for Bangladesh was referenced in two episodes of the famed cartoon series, "[Like Father, Like Clown](#)" and "[I'm with Cupid](#)". In one Krusty the Clown overstays his welcome as a house guest but is able to stay up longer by playing the double sided LP, while in "I'm with Cupid", the shopkeeper Apu's record collection contains *The Concert Against Bangladesh* LP, (a 'reversal gag' moniker) featuring a mushroom cloud on the cover, reflecting Indian-Pakistani nuclear rivalry in the region.²⁵

A 'reversal gag' type track "The Concert in Bangla Desh" on the National Lampoon team's 1972 [Radio Dinner](#) album features two Bangladeshi stand-up comedians played by Tony Hendra and Christopher Guest (who went on to legendary *This is Spinal Tap*²⁶ fame) performing to starving refugees in an attempt to collect a bowlful of rice so that George Harrison can mount a hunger strike. In not atypically tasteless style, *in a year when Bangladesh and Ethiopia both faced famine conditions*, a July 1974 National Lampoon magazine cover²⁷ spoofed the *Concert for Bangladesh* album cover by featuring a chocolate version of the LP's starving child with a chunk of head bitten off....

National Lampoon's most famous literary alumni, PJ O'Rourke, the libertarian right wing satirist²⁸ did years later in 1995 go on to write an informative reportage essay on a visit to Bangladesh, including a typically idiosyncratic but detailed review of the Grameen Bank in which he stated Mohammad Yunus's finest insight was to not be content with 'just professor-ing economics but to start practising it.' (See also *In books*)

As noted earlier under *Stories to tell*, Bangladesh's relative success for its income level in reducing population growth rates and improving its UN Human Development Index rankings owes a lot to its large NGO sector exemplified by the likes of BRAC²⁹ and Grameen. Mohammad Yunus' status as a global development icon has been sealed by many honours, but being invited to appear as himself in the Simpsons (see *front cover - Simpsons episode 466*) conferred a cachet all of its own.

²⁴ <http://www.himalmag.com/component/content/article/2890-.html>

²⁵ <http://simpsonswiki.net/wiki/Bangladesh>

²⁶ Directed by Rob Reiner (1984) <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0088258/>

²⁷ A less offensive riff on the 'Beatle association' was used in National Lampoon's *Look back at the 80s* (published in 1979)

²⁸ PJ O'Rourke's *All the Trouble in the World: The Lighter Side of Famine, Pestilence, Destruction and Death.*, ISBN-10: 0330331779

²⁹ BRAC (the world's largest Southern based NGO) set up its fair trade retail arm Aarong in 1978 marketing mainly to middle class Bangladeshis – it is also a supplier to the UK's influential Traidcraft fair trade brand founded a year later in England

As an Aside

At this stage it is worth noting the cultural history of the *comedy Indian/Bombay Welsh* Peter Sellers accent used by Hank Azaria to voice Indian shopkeeper Apu in the Simpsons. Identity politics is a complex ever evolving topic about which, as indicated in the introduction, it is never accurate to generalise or make sweeping statements. It is clearly historically the case though in the UK and elsewhere that Bangladeshis have often been viewed as just a sub set within more generalised perceptions (or sometimes racist views) of people with South Asian sub-continent (or latterly Muslim) heritage.

Differing immigration histories between the UK and US mean that even though it was the great British character actor Peter Sellers who popularised the comedy Indian accent in the 1960s, UK comics have since the 70s traditionally been more sensitive about its use than their US counterparts. Which is why a Sellers associated catchphrase was to become the title of the 1990s BBC comedy series *Goodness Gracious Me*³⁰ that subverted British Asian stereotypes for a universal audience and had many classic role reversal sketches including the famous 'Going for an English' skit parodying boorish behaviour by clientele at Indian restaurants in the UK³¹ (which are famously more often than not run by British Bangladeshis.)

Of course Sellers use of the comedic Indian voice can be seen as affectionately intended; as a friend of the Beatles and Ravi Shankar, he was the first person Shankar thought of when talking to George Harrison about his wish to raise funds for Bangladeshi refugees in 1971. And he was presumably an admirer of Indian director Satyajit Ray's '*Apu Trilogy*' masterwork of the three cinematic classics (for which Shankar provided music) which began with *Panther Panchali* in 1955³² based on a famous Bengali novel, as he named the pet monkey character 'Apu' in *The Party* (a 1968 Hollywood farce) -one or other of which films is credited with inspiring the name of the Simpson's character.

However because for twenty years or so from the late 60s in the UK, far right activism and its associated threat of violence against visible minorities had a significant physical presence – so the fear of so called 'Paki-bashing' or random violence directed by white racists at anyone brown skinned was much greater at street level - British audiences and comedians began to be far more wary of using the *Bombay Welsh* accent – *not that its use died out or anything like that* - but more people became more sensitive about using it for fear of possibly giving offence/being seen as racist – or even worse - being branded by association with the proclivities of the small minority of violent racist attackers – whom popular movements such as *Rock Against Racism* and the *Anti-Nazi League* did much to counter during the 70s and 80s.³³

³⁰ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goodness_Gracious_Me_\(BBC\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goodness_Gracious_Me_(BBC))

³¹ Although fans of the hugely influential BBC series *Not the 9 O Clock News* (1979-82) will recall Rowan Atkinson got in to this territory first on TV with sketches about a restaurant waiter and a party conference speech respectively (and *Not* once had a newsreader gag featuring footage of Shia devotees inflicting pain on themselves with a voiceover announcing 'The Bangladesh Race Relations Board is to launch an inquiry into a bout of self-inflicted Paki-bashing.'
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/notthenineoclock/>

³² See <http://www.empireonline.com/features/100-greatest-world-cinema-films/default.asp?film=17> and here for a proper appreciation of Ray's classics <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-the-apu-trilogy-1959>

³³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-Nazi_League -Rock Against Racism by the way was formed in direct reaction to drunken rants made by Eric Clapton (an artist at both the Concert for Bangladesh and Live Aid) in 1976 in support of Enoch Powell's infamous anti-immigrant stance <http://www.dkrenton.co.uk/anl/anl.html>

Whilst racism in all its forms survives in all societies, the UK's experience in adapting to its growing non-white communities in this period is largely a positive one. For much of the British Bangladeshi community which then even more than now, lived in inner city areas such as East London, such forms of solidarity were vital in the period before it became an established self confident community better able to resist violent attacks.

All of which is a long winded way of explaining why 'the P word' has dropped from polite/mainstream usage in the UK (and which is why its postmodern use in capable clever routines by the non-racist comedian *Richard Herring* can be funny.)³⁴ By contrast in the US, bar Kal Penn's remarkably adroit use (and put down) of the Simpsons Apu character's catchphrase in *Harold & Kumar Get the Munchies*³⁵ and this rather angry criticism of the essentially lovable Simpsons character in a later Guardian piece that "7-Eleven is spending millions of dollars to push a crude ethnic stereotype well past its sell-by date,"³⁶ are relative outliers as critics.

Not that *funny foreigner* accents have disappeared from UK comedy exactly as the international success of Sacha Baron Cohen's characters demonstrates– but the performers involved do their best to make sure they are far removed from the perceived racial hostility exhibited by some performers in the past – and audiences are far more wary about such humour overall.³⁷ Which background perhaps suggests received opinion is incorrect in assuming that political correctness and humour about/against it, only originated after the 1980s. When in fact earlier performers had long based humour along similar lines. Arguably some of the doctrinal discussions about feminism among factions within *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (1979)³⁸ share this flavour for example.

On the other hand even though British filmmakers like Powell & Pressburger in *A Matter of Life and Death*³⁹ had long made modern use of non-white actors in films and the UK film industry made a global superstar of Omar Sharif in the 60s, (whilst the occasional TV producer in those days made efforts to incorporate non-white characters albeit usually as background in various TV series,) in 1981 it still took an American outsider to point out some home truths as John Landis, director of *American Werewolf in London* recalled in the Guardian in 2009:

*We had terrible trouble with the unions, too. At that time, you couldn't find what they then called a "coloured" face to be an extra. I remember after George Lucas shot Star Wars in London, he showed it to all of us and I said to him after the screening: "George, is everybody in outer space white?" I knew London to be a multicultural place - we filmed in the year of the Brixton riots, remember - but I just couldn't get Indian or black faces to be in the crowd. Eventually, after a big stand-off, the unions gave in and we got "coloured" faces into the background.*⁴⁰

But to return to the Concert for Bangladesh, PTO.....

³⁴ <http://www.richardherring.com/warmingup/?id=2460>

³⁵ Dir. Danny Leiner (2004) <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0366551/>

³⁶ Note the sub-editors pun on Ray's films here- <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/jul/16/theaputragedy>

³⁷ *Comedy foreign accents: Are they ever a good idea?* 17 November 2011 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-15772642>

³⁸ Dir. Terry Jones (1979) <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0079470/>

eg: STAN on every man's right to have babies...http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Life_of_Brian

(By the way whether Ian Dury's line 'Two fat persons click click click' [instead of the traditional bingo call of two fat ladies,] in the lyrics of Blockheads single 'Hit me with your rhythm stick' (Stiff 1978) is down to political correctness or scanning is a question for QI)

³⁹ 1946 - <http://www.imdb.co.uk/title/tt0038733/>

⁴⁰ See <http://www.imdb.co.uk/title/tt0082010/> (Landis 1981) and Guardian 30 August 2009

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2009/aug/30/john-landis-american-werewold-london> (Landis is a US comedy legend himself as his helming of the Werewolf film, *Animal House*, *Blues Brothers*, *Trading Places* et al demonstrate)

In addition to making significant reference to the Concert for Bangladesh in his memoirs,⁴¹ George Harrison himself sent it up in the Dick Clement-directed comedy *Water*, in 1985⁴². Although overlooked compared to the many fondly remembered British films Harrison's Handmade company was to produce after *Life of Brian*,⁴³ (despite featuring Michael Caine as the ganja smoking Governor General of a fictional Caribbean backwater in a whimsically subversive decolonisation satire – scripted by UK comedy giants Clement and Le Frenais of *Likely Lads* and *Auf Wiedersehen Pet fame*⁴⁴), it is noteworthy for Harrison appearing himself along with Ringo Starr, Eric Clapton, Jon Lord as part of a surprise stage performance, supposedly before the United Nations General Assembly at the so-called *Concert for Cascara*.

Two last words on the Beatles and Bangladesh.

- See next page opposite – John Lennon in scathing form about benefit concerts when asked about the Concert for Bangladesh, a few weeks before he was murdered in New York. The most confessional and entertaining interviewee from the legendary quartet was as forthright as ever in his opinions. *Despite his cynicism* (which may have been exacerbated by his criticism of Harrison for not mentioning him much in his memoirs – see footnote below) it also reveals his support for the Christian practice of tithing 10% of income to charity.
- Nothing to do with Bangladesh, but that Asian boy in the middle of this famous LP sleeve (used in The Beatles 1967-70 compilation) sure looks Bengali (which could place him as one of the British Bangladeshi community long established around the Somers Town location of this photograph in Camden) .
So, a question to ask of any Bangladeshi males brought up in inner London born c.1959.....



<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/pictures/photos-the-beatles-romp-through-london-in-1968-20101210>

St Pancras gardens and church London NW1 1UH

From the 'Mad day out' 28 July 1968

⁴¹ I ME MINE by George Harrison - Genesis publications (1980) Ganga Publishing Simon Schuster ISBN 0-671-42787-3 Which is particularly interesting given that by that stage in 1980, for most of the world, the Concert for Bangladesh was simply a footnote in a long and illustrious career. Harrison however was touched to report in his memoirs that he was often greeted by Bengali waiters in Indian restaurants who thanked him for showing them "someone in the world cared, while we were fighting in the jungle." Given all the many other anecdotes and reminiscences he had from the 1960s alone, (and the fact that fellow Beatle Lennon criticized Harrison's memoirs for not talking sufficiently about their friendship), it is noteworthy that Harrison chose to highlight the Concert for Bangladesh over other events in his life and that working on the DVD release was his main project at the time of his death from cancer in 2001

⁴² <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0090297/>

⁴³ Including *The Long Good Friday* which like *Brian* had also been dropped by its original producer, not to mention *Time Bandits* (1981), *Mona Lisa* (1986) and *Withnail And I* (1987) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HandMade_Films

⁴⁴ <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/people/id/462833/>

John Lennon when asked about the Concert for Bangladesh in 1980 said:

Sheff: What about the Bangladesh concert, in which George and other people such as Dylan performed?

Lennon: **Bangladesh was caca.**

Sheff: You mean because of all the questions that were raised about where the money went?

Lennon: Yeah, right. I can't even talk about it, because it's still a problem. You'll have to check with Mother [Yoko], because she knows the ins and outs of it, I don't. But it's all a rip-off. So forget about it. All of you who are reading this, don't bother sending me all that garbage about, "Just come and save the Indians, come and save the blacks, come and save the war veterans,"

Anybody I want to save will be helped through our tithing, which is ten percent of whatever we earn.

Sheff: But that doesn't compare with what one promoter, Sid Bernstein, said you could raise by giving a world-wide televised concert - playing separately, as individuals, or together, as the Beatles. He estimated you could raise over \$200,000,000 in one day.

Lennon: That was a commercial for Sid Bernstein written with Jewish schmaltz and showbiz and tears, dropping on one knee. It was Al Jolson. OK. So I don't buy that. OK.

Sheff: But the fact is, \$200,000,000 to a poverty-stricken country in South America...

Lennon: Where do people get off saying the Beatles should give \$200,000,000 to South America? You know, America has poured billions into places like that. It doesn't mean a damn thing. After they've eaten that meal, then what? It lasts for only a day. After the \$200,000,000 is gone, then what? It goes round and round in circles. You can pour money in forever. After Peru, then Harlem, then Britain. There is no one concert. We would have to dedicate the rest of our lives to one world concert tour, and I'm not ready for it. Not in this lifetime, anyway.

From *The Playboy Interviews With John Lennon and Yoko Ono (1980)* ISBN, 1429958081, 9781429958080 .
http://davidsheff.com/Interview_John_and_Yoko.html

Passengers for Flight please board immediately at Gate.

- All right, what have you got?

Nothing, just a sitar I bought in Bangladesh.

- Bangladesh.

- Okay, strip him down, look in his eyes, look in his ears, look in his nose... and have him bend over and touch his toes and look up there.

Lousy hippies!

Early dialogue in 'Love at First Bite', a 1979 US comedy about Dracula visiting 70s Manhattan

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0079489/synopsis>

1971 AND ALL THAT (WAR CORRESPONDENTS, THE NIXON WHITE HOUSE, NGOS AND LEGACIES OF BLOOD)

"Our government has failed to denounce the suppression of democracy. Our government has failed to denounce atrocities. Our government has failed to take forceful measures to protect its citizens while at the same time bending over backwards to placate the West Pak[istan] dominated government and to lessen any deservedly negative international public relations impact against them. Our government has evidenced what many will consider moral bankrupt, (...) But we have chosen not to intervene, even morally, on the grounds that the Awami conflict, in which unfortunately the overworked term genocide is applicable, is purely an internal matter of a sovereign state. Private Americans have expressed disgust. We, as professional civil servants, express our dissent with current policy and fervently hope that our true and lasting interests here can be defined and our policies redirected."



The famous Blood telegram written by Archer Blood, American Consul General in East Pakistan shortly after the bloody crackdown by the Pakistan military at the start of the Bangladesh war of Independence (U.S. Consulate (Dacca) Cable, Dissent from U.S. Policy Toward East Pakistan, April 6, 1971 (5 pp. Includes Signatures from the Department of State. Source: RG 59, SN 70-73 Pol and Def. From: Pol Pak-U.S. To: Pol 17-1 Pak-U.S. Box 2535;)

Much was written early on about the atrocities committed during the Pakistani military crackdown at the start of the Bangladesh Independence war in March 1971. The 'Blood telegram' written by American Consul General Archer Blood⁴⁵ signed by 29 Americans is famously known now as 'one of the most strongly worded demarches ever written by Foreign Service Officers to the State Department.'

It indicates that the Nixon White House was well aware of the junta's actions, but this did nothing to deter the notorious Kissinger/Nixon 'tilt towards Pakistan' which supported the regime with continued arms shipments and was even to divert the US Navy's Seventh Fleet away from Vietnam in the latter stages of the war after India invaded to openly support the Bangladeshi *Mukti Bahini* against Pakistan forces in December 1971.

"London-based Daily Telegraph correspondent Simon Dring was the first person who flashed out to the world the genocide carried out by the Pakistani forces when Operation Searchlight was launched on the night of Mar 25, 1971. All foreign correspondents and journalists had already been expelled from Dhaka by the military authorities and Dring was one of three correspondents who at the risk of their lives managed to stay in hiding – the other two being Arnold Zeitlin and Michael Laurent. On Mar 30, Telegraph published Dring's eyewitness account of Operation Searchlight called "How Dacca paid for a united Pakistan"...."⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Obituary Washington Post <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A43422-2004Sep22.html>

⁴⁶ From <http://dev-bd.bdnews24.com/details.php?id=222492&cid=2> and http://conveylive.com/a/Operation_Searchlight https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1971_Bangladesh_genocide

The West Pakistani journalist Anthony Mascherenas is also famed for his detailed revelations in the *Sunday Times* ⁴⁷ published shortly afterwards together with the tale of his own family's escape from the military authorities.

As already noted with mention of the *Daily Mirror Save a Life* appeal in June 1971, the coverage of atrocities was well known enough for Bangladeshi refugees to be the object of a wide range of charitable appeals and press coverage in the West long before ⁴⁸ governments beyond India began to show support for the liberation struggle.

Unsurprisingly then, in addition to the famed New York concert, there was a fair amount of solidarity expressed for Bangladesh within the United States, where it briefly became a cause celebre amongst that Vietnam era's anti-war activists.⁴⁹

The Nixon White House did in addition to a well known sexist antipathy towards the then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi whom the President and his foreign policy adviser Henry Kissinger denigrated as a Soviet ally⁵⁰, have its own *Machiavellian* reason for supporting the Pakistan government; namely Kissinger was using their ally Pakistani Foreign Minister at the time, Zulifikar Bhutto (*the one West Pakistani politician who would have had the clout to have stopped the junta's actions instead of supporting them*), as a diplomatic back channel in talks with Zhou En Lai, to pave the way for Nixon's historic trip to (and subsequent recognition of) Chairman Mao's China in 1972...

As the 'opening up of China' is latterly regarded as Kissinger and Nixon's greatest foreign policy success even by their critics, it is unsurprisingly a cause for consternation among Bangladeshis that *Kissinger's choice* of Pakistan as a diplomatic back channel during the nation's bloody independence struggle is rarely brought up – except notably by his most acute critics such as Christopher Hitchens in *The Trial of Henry Kissinger*.⁵¹

(See also *Frost/Mujib v Bhutto and Kissinger v Basketcase*)

⁴⁷ The article that changed history – BBC review 16 December 2011 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16207201>

⁴⁸ <http://www.uplbooks.com/book/american-response-bangladesh-liberation-war>

⁴⁹ Including the late Senator Edward Kennedy and individuals such as Richard Taylor who disagreed with their governments stance. As a 78 year old Taylor was to recall in 2011, "when a ship headed for Pakistan with military equipment and ammunition was set to stop at a US port, one group of Americans felt it was necessary to get involved. "I was ready to risk my life there, I just wanted to get in front of that ship."

In July 1971, Taylor and a group of protesters used canoes and kayaks to try and block the Pakistani freighter Padma from reaching the Baltimore (then more famous for its port rather than *The Wire*)"

http://blog.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/08/27/ted_kennedy_remembered_in_bangladesh

<http://www.theworld.org/2011/12/american-activists-bangladesh/> (See also Eqbal Ahmed over the page)

⁵⁰ For further reading, review FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969–1976, VOLUME XI, SOUTH ASIA CRISIS, 1971 Editors: Louis J. Smith + Edward C. Keefer United States Government Printing Office Washington 2005

<http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v11/toc>

American Response to Bangladesh Liberation War by AM A Munith 1996 <http://www.uplbooks.com/book/american-response-bangladesh-liberation-war> and

Bangladesh liberation war and the Nixon White House, 1971 Authors Enayetur Rahim, Joyce L. Rahim Digitized 2008 ISBN 9844970105, 9789844970106

⁵¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Trial_of_Henry_Kissinger *The Trial of Henry Kissinger* (2001)

In the UK, where at the end of the liberation war, the Conservative government of Edward Heath was to ignore American concerns and provide Sheikh Mujib upon his release from Pakistani custody, with an aircraft to fly back to Bangladesh in triumph as a new Commonwealth leader, the Bangladesh struggle received a lot of public support.

Nonetheless because in terms of international law, the struggle was initially regarded as an internal matter for Pakistan, leading British charities such as *Oxfam* and *War on Want* did face some controversy when they led the way in arranging UK assistance for the millions of refugees who poured into India in the early months of the March-December 1971 war. (see box overleaf.)

John Pilger's dispatches for the then leading UK tabloid *Daily Mirror* which supported the *Save a Life* appeal in June that year, are available in summarised form in a highly readable chapter of the well known left wing journalist's memoirs *Heroes*. Pilger's recollections include interesting details of his friendly relationship with Sheikh Mujib after independence and the latter's reactions to his coverage of the 1974 famine. Ultimately as he ends the chapter with Mujib's assassination in 1975 shortly after his declaration of one party rule, he comments on both the West's swift turn away of interest in Bangladesh (*compassion fatigue*) and cites the sad fate of Mujib as a *textbook case of post independence Third World disillusionment*.⁵²

The most detailed account of Mujib's fall and the labyrinth of internecine disputes (arising out of *who did what in 1971*) which followed the aftermath of the Independence and have plagued Bangladeshi politics ever since was chronicled in the late Anthony Mascherenas *Legacy of Blood*.⁵³ The book details the complex web of ideological and personal disputes that underlay the bloody series of coups and counter coups that followed Mujib's murder culminating in the assassination of his successor Zia Rahman in 1981 (and which led to the suppression of democratic government until 1991)

On a more positive note, there is no doubt that the huge amount of international sympathy for Bangladesh's people during its war of independence in 1971, helped it to develop a major NGO sector which has been hugely important for its subsequent social development. The country's reputation as an incubator for successful social projects, most famously led by the Grameen Bank in the field of microcredit has earned it significant praise from development economists such as Nobel laureate Amartya Sen.

"Within Bangladesh, despite appreciation of the fame of the likes of Mohammed Yunus, there is also a widespread tendency across the political spectrum to be suspicious of NGOs as 'tools of foreign influence.' This background well documented in development journals and books has sometimes made it easy for vested interests to undermine worthy initiatives by cynically manipulating knee-jerk nationalist or religious suspicions. For example in the early 1980s, Gonashastra Kendra and Oxfam, both of whom were supporting the then Bangladesh government (and World Health Organisation's) Basic/Essential drugs programme found themselves smeared by some mullahs (apparently at the instigation of some large pharmaceutical companies) as being 'undercover Christian missionaries.' Whilst this aspect of the campaign was not successful and would probably more easily backfire against multinationals today, it does demonstrate the ease with which suspicions of NGOs can be raised."⁵⁴

⁵² *Heroes* by John Pilger, Jonathan Cape 1986 ISBN, 0896086666

⁵³ *Bangladesh: A Legacy of Blood* (ISBN 0-340-39420-X)

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/80759233/Bangladesh-A-Legacy-Of-Blood-by-Anthony-Mascarenhas>

⁵⁴ http://www.bricklanecircle.org/uploads/IDG_DFID_Bangladesh_paper_1_.pdf



EQBAL AHMED US Based Pakistani activist in 1971

"In November of 1970, after reports to congress by J. Edgar Hoover, Eqbal was indicted along with the antiwar priest Daniel Berrigan and 6 other Catholics on charges of conspiracy to kidnap Henry Kissinger in an attempt to end the war in Vietnam. The group came to be known as the Harrisburg 8. [Photo shows a press conference for the Kissinger trial. Eqbal is seated at extreme left.] One measure of Eqbal's unwavering integrity and unerring moral compass is that in April of 1971, during his trial on these trumped up conspiracy charges, he took note of the worsening situation in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), and the Pakistani army's shameful atrocities there. At a time when hardly any other Pakistani raised a voice in protest, and under all that personal stress, Eqbal took the time to write a "Letter to a Pakistani Diplomat" which is included in *Selected Writings*. After laying out a seven-point argument for why the Pakistani government's actions would only end in disastrous secession (which, of course, they did within the year), he writes: *I know that I shall be condemned for my position. For someone who is facing a serious trial in America, it is not easy to confront one's own government. Yet it is not possible for me to oppose American crimes in Southeast Asia or Indian occupation of Kashmir while accepting the crimes that my government is committing against the people of East Pakistan. Although I mourn the death of Biharis by Bengali vigilantes and condemn the irresponsibilities of the Awami League, I am not willing to equate their actions with that of the government and the criminal acts of an organized, professional army.*

After their deliberations, the jury declared a mistrial in the Harrisburg 8 case in April of 1972."⁵⁵

War on Want and 1971 - Growing radicalisation⁵⁶

"As War on Want developed, its underlying political stance pushed it into growing radicalisation and confrontation with the authorities, particularly the Charity Commission. The struggle for the creation of the state of Bangladesh was an early case in point. Independence forces in what was then East Pakistan won a huge victory in the elections at the end of 1970, and tensions increased as West Pakistan refused to allow East Pakistan to secede. Then, on 25 March 1971, a massacre by West Pakistan troops triggered a brutal civil war. Adding to the devastation caused by a recent cyclone, the war led to starvation, a cholera epidemic and a mass exodus, with eight million people seeking asylum in India.

While many charities pulled out during the worst of the conflict, War on Want stayed. Moreover, it made clear from early on that it supported the struggle of the Bangladeshis for national liberation. Soon after the end of the war, War on Want made a loan of £100,000 to the new government so it could buy rice to alleviate hunger. It stipulated that the loan was to be repaid in local currency to fund development projects in the country. War on Want has maintained its close links with the people of Bangladesh, still supporting the struggle of Bangladeshi women garment workers to earn a living wage today.

As was to happen again and again, War on Want's unequivocal support for the liberation struggle in Bangladesh created a backlash in the UK. In March 1972, the organisation's offices were burgled, with a note left behind criticising War on Want for its support for Bangladesh. At about the same time, the Charity Commission complained about the content of a War on Want advertisement in the Times. The advert sought to raise awareness of 'the plight of the people of Bangladesh' but the commission said that War on Want 'had crossed the borderline into the political sphere'. War on Want decided to fight back, publicising the case and challenging the commission's judgement. It was deluged with telegrams of support and funding to cover legal costs. Other early experiences soon convinced War on Want that its main focus must be to fight the causes of poverty, not its symptoms – a principle that it has adhered to ever since."

Mark Luetchford & Peter Burns, 'Waging the War on Want: 50 Years of Campaigning Against World Poverty', London: War on Want, 2003 [SOAS classmark: SCRR REF 147/744064].

⁵⁵ Extracted from http://www.3quarksdaily.com/3quarksdaily/2006/08/monday_musing_e.html

See also Eqbal Ahmad *Confronting Empire Interviews with David Barsamian* South End Press, 2000

⁵⁶ From articles by Sue Branford (trustee) and Executive Director John Hilary and the official history book noted <http://www.redpepper.org.uk/war-on-want-poverty-is-political/>
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/poverty-matters/2011/feb/14/war-on-want-60-year-struggle>

FROST/MUJIB (JANUARY 1972) v BHUTTO



CLIPS AVAILABLE AT:

<http://clipsfactory.blogspot.com/2012/08/shiekh-mujib-with-david-frost.html>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6cD1sEsfAc>

Proof of liberated Bangladesh's status as a global news story is highlighted by the fact that within days of Mujib's return to Bangladeshi soil on 8 January 1972, David Frost, the legendary British TV presenter flew to Dacca for the interview pictured above.

At the time, Frost who in the 1960s had been a one man *British invasion* of the US all of his own, was at the height of his first bout of transatlantic fame commuting each week to present shows in London and New York, so it is noteworthy that Mujib's return was sufficient to prompt a trip far away. Some years later of course, Frost was to cement his fame with his series of interviews of disgraced US President Richard Nixon in the wake of the Watergate scandal.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ As dramatised in Peter Morgan's hugely successful play which went on to become the film *Frost/Nixon*
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/2011/jul/02/david-frost-interview-frost-nixon>

Frost/Mujib's YouTube clip provides a unique historical documentation of Mujib's return and culminates in a highly moving *Never again* exchange in which Frost memorably proclaims the famous Liberation war slogan *Joi Bangla*.⁵⁸

The tragic trajectory of Mujib's fate and the endless internecine ideological disputes about 1971 which have plagued Bangladesh in the years since,⁵⁹ means that the interview's words are picked over by friends and foes alike rather than being viewed as an interesting historical landmark. Most famously, the plausible (as suggested by the account below) albeit disputed mistake alleged to have been made by Mujib during the interview about the number of deaths in 1971 are brought up and debated to this day.

On 8 January 1972 I was the first Bangladeshi to meet independence leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman after his release from Pakistan. He was brought from Heathrow to Claridge's by the Indian high commissioner Apa Bhai Panth, and I arrived there almost immediately. Mujib was puzzled to be addressed as "your excellency" by Mr Panth. He was surprised, almost shocked, when I explained to him that Bangladesh had been liberated and he was elected president in his absence. Apparently he arrived in London under the impression that East Pakistanis had been granted the full regional autonomy for which he had been campaigning.

During the day I and others gave him the full picture of the war. I explained that no accurate figure of the casualties was available but our estimate, based on information from various sources, was that up to "three lakh" (300,000) died in the conflict. To my surprise and horror he told David Frost later that "three millions of my people" were killed by the Pakistanis. Whether he mistranslated "lakh" as "million" or his confused state of mind was responsible I don't know, but many Bangladeshis still believe a figure of three million is unrealistic and incredible.

Serajur Rahman

Retired deputy head, BBC Bengali Service
Letter to the Guardian 24 May 2011⁶⁰

Objectively of course, given the well documented ethnic cleansing of Hindus which the Pakistan army and its collaborators (a hard core of Bengali and non-Bengali Islamists) perpetrated in 1971 leading to an exodus of over 9 million refugees to India and the brutal nature of the targeted killings carried out against students and intellectuals (*most cynically in December when the war was all but over and lost to them,*) in blunt historical terms the lack of a definitive number (with estimates averaging around a million) does nothing to diminish the horrors that took place. And the plain fact is that 'even 300000' deaths within a matter of 9 months, is horrifying enough to contemplate.

Does it really matter how many people actually died in 1971?

It is perhaps important to note from the beginning that the actual number of deaths is not relevant to whether the particular accused at the International Crimes Tribunal have committed the offences of genocide or crimes against humanity to which they have been accused. Moreover, whether 3 million, 300,000 or indeed even 30,000 were killed, the number of deaths in 1971 was very very large. And no-one can really deny that. There is enough substantiated evidence to suggest that whatever the exact number of deaths, a very large number of civilians were killed. Yet, at the same time, arguably it is important for the sake of accuracy that people do not claim that a particular number of people died - whether it is too high or too low - which has no basis at all in the evidence.

Extract from David Bergman's Bangladesh War Crimes Blog

Bergman presented the 1995 Royal Television Society award winning Channel Four documentary, the 'War Crimes File' which highlighted the impunity with which alleged Bengali perpetrators of 1971 war crimes were living in the UK and advocated bringing them to justice. Over the past few years he has written a highly objective detailed blog chronicling the trials that have since taken place (including highlighting concerns and deficiencies about the currently still ongoing process)

<http://bangladeshwarcrimes.blogspot.com/search/label/1971%20death%20figures>

⁵⁸ Frost's still flourishing career with *Al Jazeera* means that there is no sign of the second part of his Autobiography – frustratingly Part 1 published in 1993, only deals with his life up to c.1970 so has no mention of the Mujib interview

⁵⁹ Eg; New Statesman 19 April 2013 <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2013/04/forty-years-bangladesh-still-shadows-war>

⁶⁰ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/may/24/mujib-confusion-on-bangladeshi-deaths>

One aspect of the persistent debates about *1971 and its aftermath* that dominates intra-Bangladeshi politics, is dispute over Mujib's handling of the many problems and conspiracies (both real and imagined) that he faced in his few short years as leader of independent Bangladesh before he was brutally murdered by a military coup in 1975. *Compounded by a nagging suspicion that despite Pakistan losing the war for Bangladesh, Mujib's nemesis the wily Bhutto was able to manipulate the peace...*

Masherenas's chronicle in *Bangladesh's Legacy of Blood* paints a picture of Mujib as a leader who in his own mind was doing his best to pragmatically cope with huge post war reconstruction challenges and the famine of 1974, whilst being assailed by a multiplicity of far-left versus far-right/religious/pro-Pakistan factions – all of whom were conspiring against each other and his government within the highly politicised army of the time.

Added to this the immense external pressure on Mujib, exacerbated by Bhutto's global diplomatic offensives which added *non-recognition of Bangladesh by China and a swathe of Muslim states* to the list of problems faced by the new country, not to mention a Cold War driven cold shoulder by the US, and it is easier in retrospect to understand why Mujib ultimately acceded to Pakistan's demands to release the top 195 Pakistani generals and soldiers accused of war crimes who had been held by India upon Pakistan's surrender on 16 December 1971.

Kamal Hossain, the eminent lawyer who was Mujib's first Foreign Secretary and chaired the committee which drafted Bangladesh's 1972 Constitution, provides a first-hand account of this turbulent time and of Mujib's preference for the pragmatic approach involving a general amnesty for collaborators and a rapprochement of convenience with Bhutto in order *to secure China's recognition and Bangladesh's entry to the United Nations in 1974*, in a new (2013) book *Bangladesh Quest for Freedom and Justice*.⁶¹

Bhutto's political escapology skills meanwhile meant that (at least until his luck ran out and he was hanged by a military dictator in 1979,) within defeated West Pakistan he was able to deflect blame for the 1971 atrocities onto the Generals whom he had purportedly (and untruthfully) promised to put on trial – and go on to rule the rump Pakistan state.

The American historian Stanley Wolpert wrote a compelling biography of Bhutto⁶² in 1993 detailing Bhutto's life and intrigues including his relationship with Mujib, with *an admiring but appalled* fascination. That Bhutto's propaganda offensives against Bangladesh and Mujib had some success is highlighted by the fact that he was able to charm the renowned Italian journalist Orianna Fallacci in her famous 1972 *Interview with History*,⁶³ which paints a warts and all portrait of Bhutto that was sufficiently admiring enough to be much reproduced by Bhutto's acolytes and anti-Bangladeshi propagandists.

Fallacci's antipathy towards Bangladesh was initiated by her disgust at being present during the bayoneting of some alleged collaborators by a small group of vigilantes before a large angry crowd in Dacca at the end of the liberation war, which resulted in a set of (award winning) press photos linked to overleaf. John Pilger by contrast in *Heroes*, who was also present that day, writes it up as a lesson in journalistic ethics as his

⁶¹ The University Press Limited, Bangladesh; 1ST edition (2013) ISBN-10: 9845060404

⁶² *Zulfi Bhutto of Pakistan: His Life and Times* Stanley Wolpert (1993) ISBN-10: 0195076613

⁶³ <http://bhutto.org/Acrobat/interview-with-history.pdf>

cameraman and others had turned away from taking the fateful shots. Fallacci on the other hand aided by a poor experience with Mujib in Dacca, took away from this a picture of Bangladesh as an example of what she later dubbed (in an undoubtedly perceived if not outright intended to be racist manner) as 'Third World/Muslim barbarity.'

It is ironic given the democratic secular slogans under which Bangladeshi freedom fighters had fought and the fact their opponents in both the Pakistan army and local collaborator death squads, had been indoctrinated with Islamist inspired anti-Bengali propaganda, that in the years before her death in 2006, Fallacci *continued to speak of Bangladesh* in the same breath as her much vaunted trips to Khomeni's Iran and criticisms of latter day Bin Laden inspired terrorism.⁶⁴ That this was based on a mix of her negative experiences of post liberation Dacca and Bhutto's charm offensive provides a potent, early illustration of Bangladesh's historical weakness in *projecting* itself abroad.



"The controversy surrounding the photos were that many photographers deemed that the massacre would never have occurred if they (the photographers) were not there. It was as if they were invited to a 'photo-opportunity', many recalled. Many photographers, including Magnum's Marc Riboud, UPI's Peter Skingley, ITN's Richard Linley, and Panos' Penny Tweedie, left. They asked all others to join them, but others like the Observer's Tony McGrath and the Daily Express's William Lovelace deemed they have a duty to remain and tell the story. Two of those who stayed behind, Horst Faas and Michael Laurent of AP decided to pool their photos and shared the 1972 Pulitzer."

FROM: <http://iconicphotos.wordpress.com/2009/07/08/death-in-dacca/> (see also *Pilger's Heroes*)

⁶⁴ Not to mention that the purportedly secular Bhutto was himself responsible for introducing some Islamist inspired discriminatory and obscurantist laws to Pakistan's legal codes. Fellow contrarian writer Christopher Hitchens who whilst like her was always anti-clerical and became known after the World Trade Center terrorist attacks of 9/11 as an advocate of Bush's war in Iraq, differed from Fallaci (and was unusual in the 1980s US) with his lifelong pro-Palestinian writings, and does at least allude to Fallaci's more questionable remarks about Muslim immigrants in Europe and stays consistent to his critique of Kissinger and Bhutto, in his otherwise admiring profile for Vanity Fair of Fallaci's undoubtedly remarkable interviewing career and life in 2006 <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2006/12/hitchens200612>

KISSINGER v BASKETCASE

INT. Somewhere in Washington DC c.late 1973/early 1974.....

Dr. Kissinger: (to Mr. Williams)

Will there be a massive famine in East Pakistan?

Mr. Williams

They have a huge crop just coming in.

Dr. Kissinger

How about next spring?

Mr. Williams

Yes, there will be famine by next spring unless they can pull themselves together by the end of March.

Dr. Kissinger

And we will be asked to bail out Bangla Desh from famine next spring?

Mr. Williams

Yes.

Dr. Kissinger

Then we had better start thinking about what our policy will be.

Mr. Williams

By March Bangla Desh will need all kinds of help.

Mr. Johnson

They'll be an international basket case.

Dr. Kissinger

But not necessarily our basket case.

Extracted from Document 235 in Volume XI of the *Foreign Relations of the United States series* for 1969-1976 titled "South Asia Crisis, 1971"

Sometime around 1974, it became public knowledge that the famed US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had described Bangladesh as a 'basketcase' forever to be carried around like a war invalid on a basket of foreign aid. A Bangladeshi trade deal with Cuba around this period is often thought to have added to his personal reluctance to help Bangladesh during the 1974 famine. The above transcript suggests that perhaps he did not come up with the description himself but merely accepted it, (*although despite US recognition of Bangladesh in 1972, he did persist in calling it East Pakistan for years.*)

Despite many approaches over the years, Kissinger has declined to discuss what he sees as a throwaway remark in press conferences ever since, so his side of the legend is elusive, but it is easy to see why the 'basketcase' remark when combined with his and Nixon's stance during the 1971 war, has been attached to him ever since by Bangladeshis looking to illustrate Kissinger's antipathy to the new republic.

As with so much to do with Bangladesh's own self image and its perception overseas, the 1971 war casts a long shadow so it is no surprise that Kissinger should regularly be taken to task over the 'basketcase' remark. Less clear is who it was first came up with the approximate translation of basketcase as a '*bottomless basket*' which is much used instead by Bangladeshis writing in English of Kissinger's infamous remark.⁶⁵

Notwithstanding the above, Bangladesh has in its 40 years or so of independence had some success in mitigating the fatalistic predictions that were made for it in its early years. Most especially so in relation to its success in reducing population growth (for the '*population bomb*' was the doom-mongers apocalypse of choice in the seventies.) This can be readily illustrated by looking at the respective populations of former East and West Pakistan in 1971 and in 2011; prior to independence, Bangladesh's then 75 million people comprised nearly 60% of the combined Pakistan's population – *and historically it had been the inferior treatment by the central Pakistan government of this majority of the state's population which underlay Bangladeshi grievances*. By 2011 though, the remainder Pakistan's higher population growth rate had long reversed the pre-war situation and outstripped Bangladesh's c.150m+ people at that stage to top 175m.

Even more dramatic has been the resilience of Bangladesh's people in coping with the floods for which it is famous (and on which its soil's fertility historically depends.) Improved communications and flood shelter networks have hugely cut the number of deaths from extreme weather 'events' (of which the most famous in 1970 ahead of that year's pivotal Pakistan election, was a tidal bore/tsunami that killed hundreds of thousands in the south of the country.)

All such improvements are only relative of course in a country with large levels of absolute deprivation and a history of dysfunctional politics and poor governance, but they are improvements nonetheless and (like the country's positive performance against Millennium Development Goals for its income bracket) are plain to see. In an analysis entitled '*Out of the Basket*,' in November 2012, the *Economist* identifies four factors (a troika of the strong NGO sector backing governmental social spending and support for empowerment of women, coupled with rising income from remittances) to which it attributes Bangladesh's success in breaking the constraints of the basketcase image.⁶⁶

On the other hand however, the adverse consequences of climate change present a huge threat to Bangladesh and have largely replaced population and floods in the annals of negative predictions for the country.....⁶⁷

What would you do if you were a Bangladeshi waiter in New York and suddenly found yourself serving the bogeyman of your national nightmare – Henry Kissinger? It's been over 40 years since Bangladesh became independent but as Anis makes clear it still loves to hate Henry Kissinger. In 1971 he was the national security advisor and as Pakistani troops tried to brutally crush the independence movement in what became Bangladesh, Henry Kissinger sided with Pakistan because that was his corridor to Beijing. And Bangladeshis remember that.

<http://kalw.org/post/good-night-mr-kissinger> Sandip Roy reviewing *Good Night, Mr. Kissinger and Other Stories* by K. Anis Ahmed (2012) ISBN-10: 9845061176 on KALW Radio San Francisco 91.7FM

⁶⁵ Daily Star 12 April 2013 <http://www.thedailystar.net/beta2/news/origins-of-phrases/>

⁶⁶ Economist November 2012 <http://www.economist.com/blogs/feastandfamine/2012/11/bangladesh>

⁶⁷ *All Things Must Pass* as George Harrison once wrote, but one can only hope this does not come to be... <http://goodbyebangladesh.blogspot.com/>

POETRY CORNER GINSBERG AND VIDAL ON THE JESSORE ROAD

September on Jessore Road (Allen Ginsberg 1971 – extract from)

*Millions of babies watching the skies
Bellies swollen, with big round eyes
On Jessore Road-long bamboo huts
Noplace to shit but sand channel ruts*

*Millions of fathers in rain
Millions of mothers in pain
Millions of brothers in woe
Millions of sisters nowhere to go*

*Millions of Souls nineteen seventy-one
homeless on Jessore under grey sun
A million are dead, the millions who can
Walk toward Calcutta from East Pakistan*

*Wet processions Families walk
Stunted boys big heads don't talk
Look bony skulls & silent round eyes
Starving black angels in human disguise*

*Mother squats weeping and points to her sons
Standing thin legged like elderly nuns
small bodied hands to their mouths in prayer
Five months small food since they settled there*

*On one floor mat with a small empty pot
Father lifts up his hands at their lot
Tears come to their mother's eye
Pain makes mother Maya cry*

*On Jessore road Mother wept at my knees
Bengali tongue cried mister Please
Identity cards torn up on the floor
Husband still waits at camp office door*

*Baby at play I was watching the flood
Now they won't give us any more food.....*

No introduction is needed for the acclaimed American poet and activist who authored the Beat culture classic 'Howl.' As a frequent visitor to India in the 60s, he took a personal interest in and directly witnessed the suffering of the Bangladesh refugees described in the above extract from his acclaimed *On Jessore Road* poem. ⁶⁸

⁶⁸ See <http://www.allenginsberg.org/index.php?page=jessore-road-india> and <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/september-on-jessore-road/>

Whilst rapidly urbanising, as traditionally rural cultures with a deeply rooted vernacular tradition, Bangladeshis and West Bengalis alike take pride in national poets Kazi Nazrul Islam and Rabindranath Tagore, so it is no surprise that Ginsberg's moving exposition should feature as a souvenir in Dhaka's Bangladesh Liberation War Museum.⁶⁹

And on a completely different note.....

Kaiser Haq, Professor of English at Dhaka University and an acclaimed translator and poet, wrote the poem which is partially reproduced below, entitled *Published in the Streets of Dhaka*. Amusingly, this was inspired by a bon mot of the late American essayist Gore Vidal, about a supposed faux pas of his being spread so far and wide that it was *even* published in the streets of Dhaka. Haq's poem disputes the likelihood of this actually having happened. *Although* – at least until broadband decimated print sales, the ability of Dhaka street sellers to hawk all manner of (usually copyright avoiding Indian produced) English books to people stuck in traffic was impressive enough to make me wonder.....

EXTRACT FROM 'PUBLISHED IN THE STREETS OF DHAKA' BY KAISER HAQ⁷⁰

Pretty objects continued to be admired until 1875 when the phrase "pretty-pretty" was coined. That did it. For the truly clever, apt, and skilful, the adjective pretty could only be used in the pejorative sense, as I discovered thirty years ago while being shown around King's College by E.M. Forster. As we approached the celebrated chapel (magnificent, superb, a bit much), I said, "Pretty." Forster thought I meant the chapel when, actually, I was referring to a youthful couple in the damp middle distance. A ruthless moralist, Forster publicized my use of the dread word. Told in Fitzrovia and published in the streets of Dacca [now spelt Dhaka], the daughters of the Philistines rejoiced; the daughters of the uncircumcised triumphed. For a time my mighty shield was vilely cast away.

– Gore Vidal, "On Prettiness", *New Statesman*, March 17, 1978.

Pretty, isn't it-sure he's caught
You on the wrong foot, Mr. Morgan Forster
Broadcasts his priggish amusement
Over cigar and port in the King's SCR.

The story travels swiftly-and why not,
It's suitably droll-to Fitzrovia,
Where poets moustached with Bitter froth
Nibble nuts and gossip in equal measure.

But all the way to monsoon-racked Dhaka?
That's a stretch! I should know,
I was born and live here.
Your pretty tale swinging into print
Under the bamboo, the banyan and the mango tree
Is the height of absurdity-isn't that your point?

Point taken. Now imagine the dread
Of a writer from Dhaka. Yes, a writer,
For Homo Scriptor has a local branch, you know,
And at bazaar booksellers' such things
As lyric verse and motley belles lettres
Peep out of routine stacks of Exam Guides
Like rusty needles-I too have perpetrated a few.

But your unsolicited publicity may well put paid
To the prospects of any pamphlet or book
Published in the humble streets of Dhaka.
After all, Mr. Gore Vidal,
You are almost as famous
As Vidal Sassoon.....

⁶⁹ <http://www.liberationwarmuseum.org/>

⁷⁰ <http://www.uplbooks.com/book/published-streets-dhaka-collected-poems>

BANGLADESH I LOVE YOU – MOHAMMAD ALI AND THE JAPANESE RED ARMY VISIT IN THE LATE 70s

Within the space of a year, the late seventies saw a coincidence of two dramatically different visits by overseas visitors to the then still very young state of Bangladesh.

In September 1977, a gang of terrorists affiliated to the Japanese Red Army hijacked Japan Air Lines flight 472 en route from Tokyo to Paris, diverting it to Dhaka airport. Their 118 hostages were released in October with the help of a ransom payment and negotiations by the Bangladeshi authorities, whose handling reportedly did much to impress the government of Japan and further cement friendly bilateral relations.⁷¹

Happier circumstances saw Mohammad Ali who was then very much at the apex of his seventies celebrity, visit Bangladesh for a short trip filmed by British based Indian born filmmaker Reginald Massey for a documentary titled *Bangladesh I love you*.

Stills from Reginald Massey's documentary film made in 1978, which records Muhammad Ali's tour of Bangladesh following his defeat in 1977 by Leon Spinks. Ali is taken to Sundarbans (UNESCO World Heritage Site), Sylhet Tea Gardens, Rangamati and Cox's Bazaar. In Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, Ali is given a Bangladesh passport and made a citizen of the country by the then president of the country, Ziaur Rahman. The climax of his tour was a pre-arranged boxing match at Dhaka Stadium, where he "lost" to a twelve years old Bangladeshi rival through an amazing knockout.



See <http://explore.bfi.org.uk/4ce2b6f19fcd7> and <http://ftvdb.bfi.org.uk/sift/title/143095> For the director's biography and works see, <http://www.reginaldmassey.co.uk/> and <http://www.sasfor.com/5/category/all/1.html>. Massey expounded on the films background in a 2012 talk for *Bengal History Week* and *Black History Month* hosted by *Brick Lane Circle*. www.bricklanecircle.org/ <http://www.confluence.org.uk/2012/12/12/theatre-bangladesh-i-love-you/>

⁷¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan_Airlines_Flight_472

At the time, Ali was near the apex of his seventies celebrity and able to draw crowds of hundreds of thousands all around the world, which he duly did in Bangladesh...⁷²

Likewise, there was much global media interest at the time about the spate of 1970s airline hijackings inspired by Western based far left terrorist cells most notoriously *Baader-Meinhof* of whom the Japanese Red Army could be considered as an ally.

It is interesting therefore to observe that both these high profile visits (Ali's celebrity tour of Bangladesh and the terrorists' diversion of hostages to Dhaka) were *in part influenced* by Bangladesh's international image in the West at the time.

The hijackers for instance mistakenly believed that as a newly independent non-aligned state, they would receive a sympathetic hearing in Bangladesh which they had *incorrectly* hoped might back their anti-western stance and criminal act, although of course this did not turn out to be the case.

Not entirely dissimilarly, the filmmakers initiated Ali's trip to Bangladesh because they had sympathised with its people during their independence struggle and wanted (along the Bangladesh government) to boost Bangladesh's international image. The newly elected President Carter backed Ali's decision to make the trip, as part of Carter's own distancing of his Administration from the more anti-Bangladeshi stance taken by Nixon. This formed a small but noteworthy part of Carter's general policy of seeking to usher in a new post-Vietnam era for the US with his human rights led foreign policy. Chomsky-ites may dispute the extent of change actually brought about by Carter who was to ramp up the Cold war after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979,⁷³ but there is no doubting Carter's sincerity and sympathy towards Bangladesh.



PHOTOGRAPHER / CREDIT: Marion S. Trikosko **DATE:** September 7, 1977

For ordinary Americans, Carter's departure from his predecessor's policies (of both parties) had been signalled by his invitation to a wide range of prominent anti-Vietnam war activists, including Ali and John Lennon (pictured overleaf) to his Presidential

⁷² Undertaken without a lucrative fight deal (which he undertook in Marcos's Philippines and Mobutu's Zaire, the latter's condemnation by his former mentor Malcolm X notwithstanding,) or an overt political mission like his missions for Carter

⁷³ And endured humiliation from Khomeini in the Iran hostage crisis - who held on from releasing his US hostages until the moment after Carter formally left office in 1981

inauguration in January 1977. One coda to Ali's Bangladesh tour explained by Reginald Massey in a 2012 Brick Lane Circle talk is that he and his colleagues had sought to follow up the Bangladesh film with a trip by Ali to India – but this was curtailed after Carter prevailed on Ali to embark upon a diplomatic tour of African states, in support of his call to boycott the 1980 Moscow Olympics following the invasion of Afghanistan.



Credit:
© Wally McNamee/CORBIS

UNITED RED ARMY (2012 film directed by Naeem Mohaiemen)

: A film about the 1977 hijack of Japan Airlines 472 at Dhaka Airport.

United Red Army is a 67-minute video about the September 28, 1977, hijacking of Japan Airlines Flight 472, en route from Paris to Tokyo to Dhaka, by a unit of the Japanese Red Army. The film is anchored and bracketed by Mohaiemen's personal memory of himself as a frustrated eight-year-old whose favorite TV show, "The Zoo Gang," was superseded by a live broadcast of the hijacking-and-hostage crisis. An unprecedented media event for the young nation of Bangladesh, whose broadcast capabilities at the time were rudimentary at best, the airplane drama dragged on for days, a seeming eternity for the little boy awaiting the return of his beloved show. While researching the project, Mohaiemen stumbled upon archival audio-recordings of the marathon radio negotiations between the hijackers' representative, code-named Dankesu, and the Bangladeshi hostage negotiator, Air Vice Marshall A. G. Mahmud, operating from the control tower. Mohaiemen's treatment of the audio makes the film stand out. Fascinated by the deliberate, halting rhythm of the exchange between the two negotiators — the result, possibly, of the simple fact that English was the mother tongue of neither man — Mohaiemen chose to visualize what we hear as short phrases of colored text on the black screen. After a tense standoff, the hijackers' demands — \$6 million and the release of nine jailed comrades (only six agreed to go) — were met, the last time a government acquiesced to terrorists. But there is more to the story. The hijackers had headed to what they thought was an "independent, Islamic, and popular" Bangladesh, which would be sympathetic to their cause; they were unaware that a series of coups since its independence from Pakistan had resulted in a martial rather than a democratic government. And in the midst of the airplane-hostage crisis, a group of Bangladeshi officers attempted another, unsuccessful coup at the airport — with events unfolding before the hijackers and the hostages. ...The film is a chapter in an ongoing multidisciplinary research project titled "The Young Man Was...", which Mohaiemen began in 2006. Excavating and dissecting the interwoven histories of failed leftist revolutionary movements of the 1970s — both in his native Bangladesh and around the world — Mohaiemen extracts episodes from their complicated trajectories as the tremendous promise of collective utopian aspirations gave way to exhaustion, misguided violence, and failed attempts at nation building.

Excerpted from Murtaza Vali, "Complicating the History of the Left",

Blouin Art Info, <http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/760433/complicating-the-history-of-the-left>

Screened at <http://www.ulab.edu.bd/Calendar-of-Events/event/557/United-Red-Army-Film-Screening-Dhaka-Premiere/>

Also see <http://www.facebook.com/events/394518057248050/>

In the meantime Bangladesh improved its international standing in the year following the JAL hijack, by being elected for a term to the UN Security Council in 1978. A significant landmark for a nation which just a few years previously had faced great obstacles in getting admitted to the UN in the first place.

And it seems that in general Bangladeshi leaders from all political parties have tended to support a stance towards moderation in foreign policy, with Bangladesh being the prime mover in setting up the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation in 1985.⁷⁴

Not that everyone got the memo it seems, with General Sir John Hackett stereotyping Bangladesh (admittedly in only 2 lines within a doorstep of a novel) along with India as an 'anti-Western force' in his best selling scenario *The Third World War: Untold Story* about a fictional NATO v Warsaw Pact nuclear war.⁷⁵

Somewhat incongruously however given that times have changed since Bangladesh's early years, when in line with other non-aligned states and their boycott of apartheid, it proudly stamped on its passports that these were "*Valid in all countries of the world except Israel, Taiwan and South Africa,*" Bangladesh still has no diplomatic relations with Israel (despite Egypt and India to take two notable cases changing their stance.) Undoubtedly given the hugely damaging impact that secular v religious debates still have within Bangladesh, there remains a consensus among Bangladeshi politicians not to inflame Islamist passions further by considering changes to the status quo. Hence it remains rare for Bangladeshis such as the person writing in the *Jerusalem Post* at this link,⁷⁶ to advocate Bangladeshi recognition of Israel, (Churchill's famous dictum about recognition notwithstanding.⁷⁷)



"Bangladesh sent a search-cum-rescue team with relief goods including medicines to Japan after the devastating earthquake and tsunami in March last year. Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr. Dipu Moni donated a cheque of \$1 million to the then Japanese ambassador on behalf of private mobile operators in the country. The foreign minister said: "*Whenever Bangladesh became the victim of natural disasters, Japan came forward to assist us. Now time is for us to stand for our trusted friend.*" Though the aid is not so significant, it demonstrates the affection of the people of Bangladesh for the Japanese people. The bilateral relationship goes back before the birth of Bangladesh.

.....Prime Minister Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who visited Japan in October 1973, laid the solid foundation of bilateral relations. In 1975, their Imperial Highnesses the Crown Prince and Crown Princess of Japan visited Bangladesh. Bangladesh's relations with Japan took a favourable turn in unusual circumstances. A hijacked Japanese airliner landed in Dhaka in October 1977, creating a crisis in Japan. The Japanese hostages were released through the skilful handling of Bangladesh government leaders, which impressed the government of Japan."

Daily Star article by Harun ur Rashid, 8 February 2012 <http://archive.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=221467>

⁷⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Asian_Association_for_Regional_Cooperation

⁷⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Third_World_War:_The_Untold_Story ISBN 0-283-98863-0

⁷⁶ <http://www.ipost.com/Opinion/Op-Ed-Contributors/Time-for-a-quiet-revolution-in-Bangladesh-Israeli-relations>

⁷⁷ [Winston Churchill's statement upon recognising China] *But if you recognize anyone it does not mean you like them. For instance, we all recognize the right honourable gentleman the member for Ebbw Vale.*

NOT JUST JUTE: OF GARMENTS, GLOBALISATION HUMAN RIGHTS AND WRONGS

"Today, the age-old right of children to work is under attack. From the Philippines to Bangladesh, in China and India and South America too.. But you can help these children, Derek by killing the prime minister of Malaysia. "

Dialogue from a scene in which the eponymous hero is brainwashed to assassinate a fictional politician campaigning against child labour
- 'Zoolander' (dir Ben Stiller), 2001⁷⁸

At independence, Bangladesh was relatively far more rural and less industrial than today, with the majority of its export earnings still coming from jute, the famed *golden fibre* which pre-plastics had been a major worldwide commodity.

Bangladeshi jute's share of the world export market peaked in the Second World War (during which it was used for sandbags) before 1947's Partition from India split the producers mainly located in East Bengal/Pakistan from the major processors of Calcutta, which combined with the substitution of jute by polypropylene products rapidly accelerated the decline of the industry. Latterly, the jute market has started to recover because it is once more in fashion and is tough and bio-degradable. But it is no longer a dominant export earner as it once had been, as garments and remittance earnings bring in many times more foreign exchange than the jute merchants of old Bengal.⁷⁹

Today of course, Bangladesh is better known as a major global production base for the export of garments by leading Western brands. Historically this could be seen as reclamation of pre-colonial Bengal's reputation for weaving cotton and Dacca muslins.⁸⁰ However due to the nature of the garment trade, it is more likely to attract global attention due to public and consumer concerns about labour standards⁸¹ – a matter of key importance to Bangladesh given that its RMG (Ready Made Garment) sector is the country's biggest industrial employer - *particularly of women* - and export earner.

In 1993 the mere announcement that a US senator (Harkin) had proposed a bill outlawing goods produced by child labour – led to tens of thousands of workers who were or looked underage being summarily thrown out of Bangladeshi garment factories often literally onto the streets with no guarantee of school or protection from negative consequences. *The ILO and UNICEF worked with leading brands and the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) to help clarify better expectations*⁸² in such cases – so now if a brand discovers child labour in its supply chain, good practice is to help ensure schooling and to protect the livelihood of the most vulnerable and their families.

⁷⁸ <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0196229/>

⁷⁹ Dundee competed with Calcutta to be the British Empire's dominant jute centre so its university archives have plenty of related links to the fibre, the bulk of which was/is grown in East Bengal <http://www.dundee.ac.uk/archives/ww-2a.htm>
Jute and Empire: The Calcutta Jute Wallahs and the Landscapes of Empire Gordon Thomas Stewart ISBN, 0719054397

⁸⁰ <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2002/20021019/windows/main4.htm>
http://www.banglapedia.org/HT/M_0427.HTM

⁸¹ see <http://ethicalbit.wordpress.com/2013/04/25/rana-plaza-deaths-rise-calls-for-action/> and Tazreen overleaf

⁸² Which by 1995 included a memorandum of understanding creating a partnership to eliminate child labour and bring in external monitoring and verification, with the active participation of the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour). Michael E Nielsen *RIIA The politics of corporate responsibility and child labour in the Bangladeshi garment industry 1995* http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/International%20Affairs/Blanket%20File%20Import/inta_469.pdf

A list of [the most controversial companies of 2012](#) published in January 2013 by a private research provider analysing reported breaches of international standards, highlighted the *Tazreen* factory, location of the horrendous fire which killed over 117 people in Ashulia near Dhaka in Bangladesh in November 2012, at the top of its list ahead of many larger more global companies.

It must be hoped that this type of publicity and the governmental responses that followed the fire will help bring about wider safety improvements.⁸³ Yet as the many references within these reports to the 1911 Triangle fire⁸⁴ which killed a tragically similar number of people in New York a century earlier demonstrate, wherever the garment industry is located, it has been susceptible to breaches of basic labour rights and the ultra competitive nature of the industry has often attracted participants who do not uphold basic health and safety laws.

So it is *morally right but surprising* that this most basic of health and safety catastrophes placed this factory at the top of the controversy list – *as the global public is so used to associating the garment trade with images of sweatshops and cheap labour, that many are inured to hearing of breaches of standards* and even deaths in this type of factory fire are commonly underreported internationally.

Bangladesh Garment Workers Have Taste of Freedom⁸⁵

By Swapna Majumdar WEnews correspondent
Monday, July 15, 2002

The hours are long, the wages are low and the conditions hazardous, yet Bangladeshi women are finding their garment industry wages provide them visibility and even authority in a society that once ignored them.

DHAKA, Bangladesh (WOMENSENEWS)--



Mashuda
Shefali Khatun

Photo by Shehzad Noorani
for www.ashoka.org

A WAR ON WANT report presents the findings of a major series of interviews conducted over six months with almost 1,000 women workers from 41 garment factories. As such, it stands as an important survey of the reality facing women workers across the Bangladeshi garment industry today.⁸⁶

⁸³ Which cannot come too quickly as disasters still occur, most tragically at Rana Plaza, Savar in April 2013
....<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-22275597>

⁸⁴ See <http://www.laborrights.org/news/coverage-of-the-tarzeen-fire>. and
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triangle_Shirtwaist_Factory_fire

⁸⁵ <http://womensenews.org/story/labor/020715/bangladesh-garment-workers-have-taste-freedom#.UT7UXdZGiLA>

⁸⁶ <http://www.waronwant.org/overseas-work/sweatshops-and-plantations/hide/inform/17318-stitched-up>

The spread of globalisation has brought with it consumers encouraging brands and producers to adopt codes of conduct on working conditions and the development of international assurance standards (such as SA8000) to monitor them. Impact assessment studies by bodies such as the *Ethical Trading Initiative* confirm these have played a part in improving standards, particularly on easier to audit issues such as child labour, but more remains to be done. [In particular, systemic issues or risks associated](#) with long/forced overtime hours, low pay, and discrimination are harder to control or root out.

Any massively competitive industry, particularly one operating where there is a large supply of cheap labour like the Ready Made Garments (RMG) export sector in Bangladesh, is likely to face some systemic breaches of standards – The challenge is how to spread good practices that already exist in the sector (*which is building more modern factories and continuing to achieve growth becoming the 2nd biggest exporter of RMG in 2012 after China*) and raise the playing field as a whole.⁸⁷

Although conscientious efforts made by some retailers and brands (and support for fair trade models by some consumers and producers) are beneficial and improve standards in the short term, in the long run experience suggests that empowering workers to help represent themselves is an essential but often *overlooked* element in sustainably safeguarding and improving standards – *not to mention productivity*.

This is not surprising perhaps as *freedom of association* and *collective bargaining* are sensitive issues in many countries or politically restricted as in China. In Bangladesh, it is to be hoped that the government's 2013 national action plan on fire safety and associated investigations in the wake of the Tazreen and similar fires will help to raise standards and prevent further accidents and deaths. The *various multistakeholder initiatives involving brands, unions, the ILO and the BGMEA (Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers & Exporters Association)* such as that convened by the global garments union (*Industrial – January 2013*) will hopefully provide a platform for further improvements in working conditions and labour rights; in the past, too much of the Bangladeshi political debate has been dominated by talk of conspiracies against the industry and speculation about the cause of fires, rather than calmly dealing with first hand testimony from workers (promptly interviewed by local media and news channels) about locked doors and lack of fire exits.

In turn, more brands and buyers need to take their own commitments and responsibilities more seriously – *retailers must be expected to follow best practice by fully addressing breaches of labour standards when they are highlighted and pro-actively working to mitigate problems, implement corrective action plans and raise standards within their supply chains* – if they fail to do this or walk away from a problem supplier as Wal-Mart is alleged to have done recently in Bangladesh, they will rightly face criticism.

Of course if as analysts suggest, the Bangladesh industry's export growth has been driven mainly by *low wages* (all the many genuine efforts to implement codes of conduct notwithstanding) it is easier to understand – if not agree with defensive and nationalistic responses made to calls to increase trade union rights in Bangladesh. The sector is too important in providing jobs (and bringing millions of women into the formal workforce) for this sort of resistance not to occur. Likewise global market pressures are so competitive that many buyers are happy to take advantage of this type of *race to the bottom*....

Certainly with the vast majority of bargaining power and finance within the sector lying in the hands of global buyers and retailers, they are the ones with the most ability to facilitate improvements to standards and wages, (*which experience suggests can be a win-win by improving productivity rather than being a cost*) – so this is *arguably where most responsibility lies* and where consumers and activists will target most pressure to help raise standards.

<http://www.industrialunion.org/industrial-promotes-rights-of-garment-workers-in-bangladesh>

<http://www.ilo.org/global/standards/lang-en/index.htm>

http://www.fibre2fashion.com/news/apparel-news/newsdetails.aspx?news_id=121553

From <http://ethicalbit.wordpress.com/labour-standards/>

⁸⁷ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2012/07/03/consolidating-accelerating-exports-bangladesh>

Bangladesh factory collapse: Baby is born in the rubble four days after hundreds of workers are trapped

27 Apr 2013 20:47

Rescuer Didar Hossain said the woman and her newborn baby boy were found under a pile of concrete pillars



Collapse: Factory debrisAP

A baby born in the rubble of a Bangladeshi clothing factory was rescued yesterday... four days after the building collapsed on hundreds of workers.

His mother had given birth trapped in the ruins of the Dhaka factory which had been making cheap clothes for the UK, despite earlier warnings that the damaged building should be evacuated.

Witnesses said his mother screamed, "Save my baby" as she was carried out of the wreckage on a stretcher.

Didar Hossain said the woman, in her mid-20s, did not have serious injuries and was one of 25 people pulled alive from the complex where garments were being made for Primark and other high street budget chains Matalan and Bonmarche.

As the death toll from last Wednesday's disaster rose to 336, one trade union leader claimed at least 10 British retail firms were being supplied by similar factories in Bangladesh.

It's feared as many as 1,000 people could eventually be found in the rubble, with a final death toll of over 500. Rescuers believe a floor of the eight-storey building was used by a factory employing children.

Last night, bereaved families clashed with police who had ordered an evacuation after cracks appeared in the walls. Repon Chowdrey, of the Bangladeshi Free Trade Union Congress, said UK firms have a duty to ensure suppliers have safe conditions.

Yesterday, anti-poverty campaigners protested outside Primark's Oxford Street store.

Campaigners have urged brands sourcing from Bangladesh to sign a safety agreement to prevent tragedies. They have attacked Primark for not signing the Bangladesh Fire and Building Safety Agreement providing for the inspection of every factory used by a supplier.

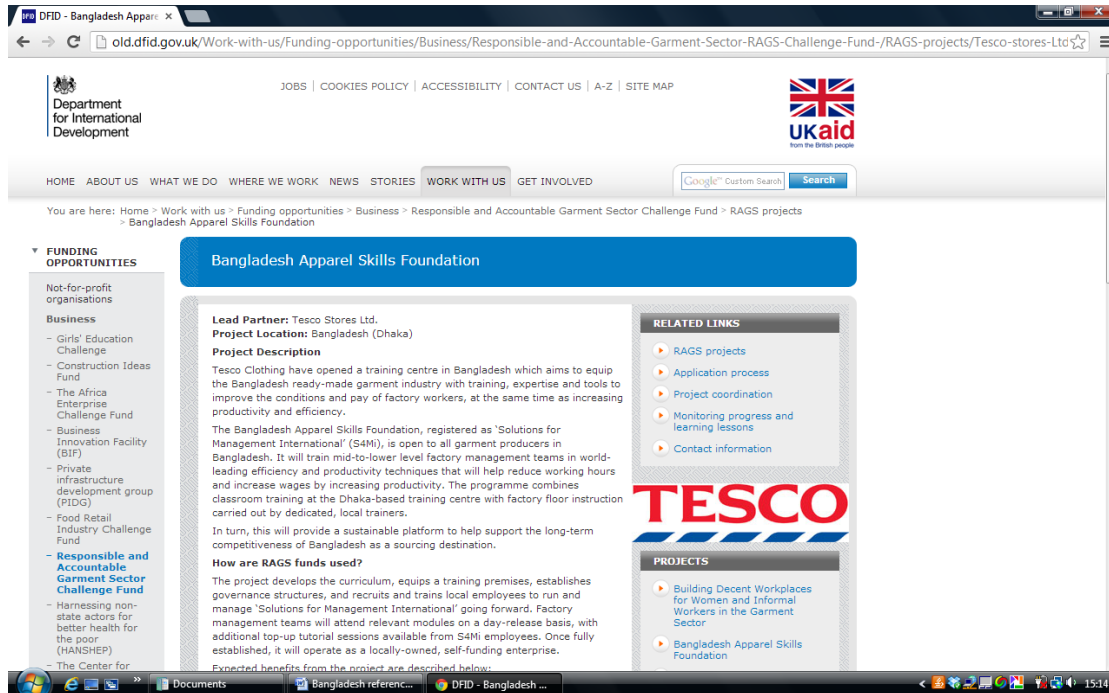
Primark believes an alternative safety agreement promoted by the UK-based Ethical Trading Initiative will be more effective. The company promised it would work with other retailers to review standards, and vowed to support the families of killed and injured workers.

Primark refused to comment on yesterday's protest but a spokesman said: "On the issue of compensation, we will of course honour our obligations in due course. How that will be done has to be finalised."

<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/bangladesh-factory-collapse-baby-born-1856379>

***BGMEA trains over 3,000 garment workers in fire safety
February 11, 2013 (Bangladesh)***

More than 3,000 mid-level readymade garment (RMG) factory workers in Bangladesh received fire safety training under the crash programme launched by Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).....⁸⁸



REMITTANCES IN GLOBALISATION

In net terms because the garment sector imports many raw materials, Bangladesh's biggest contributor of foreign exchange probably comes from the export (read - efforts) of its people working overseas, more than its sales of clothes. Like other developing countries with large overseas populations, remittances from its diaspora are vital to Bangladesh's economy and far exceed foreign aid, topping \$14 billion USD in 2012.⁸⁹ So at present it is the freedom of movement for labour rather than for capital which is the most helpful economic aspect of globalisation for Bangladesh.⁹⁰

Because of its generally low profile internationally, labour standards and working conditions within Bangladesh's burgeoning export industries are the main aspect of its human rights record, which is most likely to attract overseas attention. Despite the many

⁸⁸ http://www.fibre2fashion.com/news/Associationnews/bgmea/newsdetails.aspx?news_id=120990 For a grassroots viewpoint see *Bostrobalkara: the Garment Girls of Bangladesh*. Directed 2007 by Tanvir Mokammel. A compelling inside look at Bangladesh's garment industry. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1201138/>

⁸⁹ <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/r4d/Output/178859/Default.aspx>
<http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=264869>

⁹⁰ *But whether at home or abroad, Bangladesh's resilient workers still endure much needless suffering* - See <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/greece-despair-pervades-camps-after-33-migrant-workers-shot-manolada-2013-04-22> and <http://www.dhakatribune.com/op-ed/2013/apr/25/how-many-deaths-will-it-take-till-we-know>

interesting (and often turbulent) political debates and governance issues going on in the nation, Bangladesh's human rights issues and problems rarely attract as much global attention – whether negative or positive, as either they deserve⁹¹ or as some people within the country imagine they receive.⁹²

Thus it is that labour and safety issues (and environmental concerns) attract the most global press attention (in addition to that by local media) for Bangladesh's leather, shrimp export and ship breaking industries. Former BBC correspondent Roland Buerk's book on *Breaking Ships in Bangladesh*⁹³ provides an interestingly detailed account of workers' lives within the major shipbreaking and recycling industry sustained by the Chittagong port area; Buerk makes the point that whilst this industry will always attract controversy because of its inherent safety and environmental risks – it is also both a supplier of raw materials for the national economy and a key link in the global logistics chain benefiting all global consumers by keeping costs down for global shipowners.....

More recently in a more positive light, Forbes magazine has begun to take notice of Bangladesh's successful pharmaceutical sector (see overleaf). But first as the subject is globalisation, a historical interlude:

History corner - The East India Company (chartered 1600 –nationalised 1858 –dissolved 1874)

Criticised during its heyday by Adam Smith and Karl Marx alike, the East India Company's huge role in the expansion of the British Empire, is pivoted on its success in usurping political power from the ruler of Bengal (which includes present day Bangladesh) at the Battle of Plassey in 1757.

For many years it was de facto ruler of much of India – although it was only after actual rebellion by its own soldiers in 1857 in a bid for independence that the British Government formally overthrew the Mughal emperor whose overlord status *John Company* had acquired- and Victoria was crowned Empress of India. Private armies, coups, imperialism, bribery, corruption, monopoly abuse, exploiting peasants, poor corporate governance, and the opium trade are prominent features in its long history. Infamously, one of the East India Company's most lucrative and nefarious trades was exporting opium grown in Bengal to China.

This is a history inextricably linked with the story of tea; tea was expensive to the British empire because the Chinese empire had a monopoly on growing it for many years – and the easiest way to earn money to use in trade for tea was selling opium to addicts in China.⁹⁴ When China tried to ban opium imports, the East India Company engineered the Opium wars starting in 1840 leading directly to British rule in Hong Kong.....⁹⁵

Nick Robins

*"The Corporation That Changed the World: How the East India Company Shaped the Modern Multinational"*⁹⁶

⁹¹ For instance the 1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord was supposed to have brought an end to ethnically based conflict in that region between Bengali settlers and indigenous non-Bengali hill peoples but has *not* been fully implemented. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chittagong_Hill_Tracts_Peace_Accord and <http://cht-global-voices.com/contents/peace/>

⁹² eg; Bangladeshi media coverage of the country's position in the *Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index* probably overestimates the global public reach of this particular ranking (in which Bangladesh finished bottom for a couple of years in a row, hence its politicians' sensitivity to the CPI)

⁹³ *Breaking Ships* Buerk R, (2006); ISBN-10: 1596090367 http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1285525.Breaking_Ships. See also *Hard to Break Up*, Economist 27 October 2012 <http://www.economist.com/news/asia/21565265-controversial-industry-says-it-cleaning-up-its-act-activists-still-want-it-shut-hard-break>

⁹⁴ See *Tempest in a Tea Cup*, *Time Asia* 17 June 2002 http://www.appiusforum.net/time_asia.html and <http://www.rmg.co.uk/visit/events/gallery-favourites-online/britain-tea-and-the-opium-trade>

⁹⁵ *And in an earlier era, it was British policy on the taxation of tea exported to the American colonies by the East India Company based in Bengal which sparked the Boston Tea party and its consequences.....*

⁹⁶ By Nick Robins (2006) Pluto press ISBN: 9780745331959 see also http://www.opendemocracy.net/globalization-vision_reflections/east_india_company_3899.jsp and <http://tomorrowcompany.com/the-corporation-that-changed-the-world>

Window On A Different Dhaka

Extract from a story which appears in the 21 January 2013 issue of Forbes Asia.⁹⁷



Bangladesh has gotten off the economic mat in recent years with a big push into cheap apparel, a mixed blessing whose downside was horribly brought home in November when a Dhaka garment factory caught fire with 112 workers trapped to die inside. The misery brought unusual global attention but only reinforced notions of a sweatshop land.

Yet there is another growth sector in the world's eighth most populous nation. Its rise has surprised even those close to its pioneers. In 1999, when U.S.-trained pharmacist Abdul Muktedir decided to set up a pharmaceutical company in Bangladesh, his friends and relatives got worried. "No one in our family had ever been in business before," recalls his wife, Hasneen, daughter of a professor-turned-government-worker and a pharmacist herself. Moreover, the country's pharma industry was tiny, less than \$300 million in sales, with 150 companies competing for business.

But Abdul, with 15 years in the field already, was confident: "There weren't too many new and advanced drugs in the market. There was clearly an opportunity." Quitting his job as chief operating officer at Beximco Pharmaceuticals, a leading local firm, he took the plunge. With backing from his friends, owners of the Impress Group, a garments and media empire, he raised the equivalent of \$600,000 and started Incepta Pharmaceuticals in a 2,000-square-foot office in the heart of Dhaka city. Within a year he'd persuaded wife Hasneen, then Beximco's head of research, to join him.

The Muktedirs have since built their fledgling venture (they hold a 40% stake with Impress owning the balance) into the country's fastest-growing pharma outfit, with revenues of close to \$120 million..... though it's still half the size of the biggest pharma Square, founded by the late Samson Chowdhury, a sector pioneer.

Over a third of Incepta's stable of 338 drugs are generic medicines that were introduced for the first time in the country, such as Pantonix, a drug for gastrointestinal disorders, which today figures among the country's top three pharma products by retail sales. Similarly, its Osartil outsells all other antihypertension drugs in the market. "New products have been our platform for growth," acknowledges Abdul, seated in Incepta's 200,000-square-foot Dhaka headquarters. Tall and handsome, he cuts a striking figure. A plaque displayed in his office acknowledges him as Dhaka's second-highest taxpayer of 2011.

Incepta's dramatic rise has coincided with an ongoing expansion in the domestic pharma market. Buoyed by an economy growing at over 6% and improving access to health care for the country's 160-million-strong population, notably in the rural heartland where state-owned clinics are sprouting, it has nearly doubled in size in the past five years to \$1.1 billion. According to one estimate, pharma sales are expected to swell to \$1.6 billion by 2014.

Once heavily dependent on imported medicines, Bangladesh is now self-sufficient; 97% of all medicines are locally made. The country has no patent regime currently, although patent protection is due to come into force in the next five years. A protectionist drug policy in 1982⁹⁸ that clamped down on imports, including from neighboring India drove out multinationals that had long dominated the sector; some of them sold out to local firms.....

⁹⁷ <http://www.forbes.com/sites/naazneenkarmali/2013/01/09/window-on-a-different-dhaka/>

⁹⁸ As supported by Gonashastra Kendra and Oxfam at the time in the face of multinational lobbying – so in the long run arguably a financial benefit from the activities of Bangladesh's NGO sector to Bangladesh's entrepreneurs.

IN BOOKS – ALI, ANAM, CAMPBELL, HENSHER, RUSHDIE & MORE

But how convenient this amnesia is, how much it excuses! So permit me to criticize myself: the philosophy of acceptance to which the buddha adhered had consequences no more and no less unfortunate than his previous lust-for-centrality; and here, in Dacca, those consequences were being revealed.

'No, not true,' my Padma wails; the same denials have been made about most of what befell that night.

Midnight, March 25th, 1971: past the University, which was being shelled, the buddha led troops to Sheikh Mujib's lair. Students and lecturers came running out of hostels; they were greeted by bullets, and Mercurochrome stained the lawns. Sheikh Mujib, however, was not shot; manacled, manhandled, he was led by Ayooba Baloch to a waiting van. (As once before, after the revolution of the pepperpots... but Mujib was not naked; he had on a pair of green-and-yellow striped pajamas.) And while we drove through city streets, Shaheed looked out of windows and saw things that weren't-couldn't-have-been true: soldiers entering women's hostels without knocking; women, dragged into the street, were also entered, and again nobody troubled' to knock. And newspaper offices, burning with the dirty yellowblack smoke of cheap gutter newsprint, and the offices of trade unions, smashed to the ground, and roadside ditches filling up with people who were not merely asleep-bare chests were seen, and the hollow pimples of bullet-holes. Ayooba Shaheed Farooq watched in silence through moving windows as our boys, our soldiers-for-Allah, our worth-ten-babus jawans held Pakistan together by turning flamethrowers machine-guns hand-grenades on the city slums. By the time we brought Sheikh Mujib to the airport, where Ayooba stuck a pistol into his rump and pushed him on to an aircraft which flew him into West Wing captivity, the buddha had closed his eyes. ('Don't fill my head with all this history,' he had once told Ayooba-the-tank, 'I am what I am and that's all there is.')

And Brigadier Iskandar, rallying his troops: 'Even now there are subversive elements to be rooted out.'

*From *Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie (1981)⁹⁹*

Salman Rushdie's masterpiece *Midnight's Children* about the post independence history of the Indian sub-continent is probably the most famous English language novel written about this subject and provides a critical allegory of the failure of the sub-continent's leaders to live up to the high ideals proclaimed by Jinnah and Nehru in their respective Independence speeches for Pakistan and India in August 1947.

The multi-layered plot describes the intertwined lives of 1001 children born within the first hour after the 'stroke of midnight' of India's independence in 1947 –the story which flashes back and forth through much of the 20th century, combines lucid political commentary on real life historical events (*coups in Pakistan, Indira Gandhi's dictatorial Emergency etc*) with convoluted descriptions of the personal lives of the eponymous children who have varying degrees of magical powers, depending on how close they were born to the stroke of Nehru's famous 'midnight.' So it is interesting to note that Rushdie for all his famed scepticism and condemnation (of Indira Gandhi and Bhutto in this book or of religious viewpoints and *Mrs Torture* in the *Satanic Verses*¹⁰⁰) painted Sheikh Mujib and the struggle for Bangladeshi independence in a benign and supportive manner because it represented some of the lost ideals of India's independence hour.

Although occurring at a pivotal point in the story for the book's main characters, the Bangladesh chapter of *Midnight's Children*, which includes a surrealistic description of deserting soldiers hiding out in the Sunderbans, is sometimes left out in retellings. (But not by the Royal Shakespeare Company who managed to dramatise the striped pyjama

⁹⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Midnight's_Children ISBN 0-224-01823-X 1981

¹⁰⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Satanic_Verses

episode at least,¹⁰¹ which the more recent film version dropped for the admittedly compelling reason of shortening the famously long novel.¹⁰²)

Whilst Rushdie's sympathetic idealisation of Bangladesh's independence has been noted by literary critics in Bangladesh,¹⁰³ it is not the aspect of his career for which he is most famed there, where (like everywhere else in the world) the Satanic Verses affair overshadows his life's work.

This took an added twist in the early 90s after Bangladeshi author Taslima Nasrin suffered death threats when her Bangla novel লজ্জা (Lôjja,) translated as 'Shame,' described the sufferings of a Bangladeshi Hindu family being persecuted by Muslims in supposed reaction to the destruction of India's *Babri Masjid* by Hindu fundamentalists in 1992. Rushdie in common with other authors gave his moral support to campaigns to protect Nasrin from Islamist calls for censorship and violent threats against her personal views, but this did not prevent her from having to leave Bangladesh to live in exile, where she is now perhaps better known for literary feuds with other authors.¹⁰⁴

In the last decade, the best known English language author born in Bangladesh who regularly writes about Bangladesh, is Tahmima Anam, whose debut novel 'A Golden Age' launched her flourishing career, by telling the story of a young widow's attempts to lead a normal domestic life in Dhaka amidst the chaos and murder of the Liberation War.¹⁰⁵ More interestingly, the Liberation war setting of Anam's novels is reflected by the English novelist Phillip Hensher, within *Scenes from Early Life* published in 2012.¹⁰⁶

In deceptively simple style, Hensher relates a series of family stories from the point of view of a young boy as recalled by his husband Zaved Mahmood, a Bangladeshi lawyer who grew up within a well connected Dhanmondi family in the late 1970s/early '80s. Reflecting a period when Dhaka was a much smaller city than today and the Mahmood family's relationships with famous neighbours at that time, Hensher's novel remarkably reads as if a firsthand memoir by Zaved himself, so that his aunt's tales of incidents experienced before and during the liberation war feel more first-hand than a novel.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ RSC Adaptation *Barbican*, London January 2003 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2003/jan/30/theatre.artsfeatures3>

¹⁰² dir. Deepa Mehta (2012) <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1714866/> 2012

¹⁰³ Not to mention by Rushdie himself, as his scathing review of Benazir Bhutto's *Daughter of the East* autobiography in the *Observer* demonstrates:

"Worst of all, (Benazir) falsifies Bhutto's role in the events leading to the secession of Bangladesh to a quite scandalous degree. In Benazir's version, the blame is placed firmly on the shoulders of Sheikh Mujib, leader of the then East Pakistani Awami League. After the 1970 elections, Benazir says, "instead of working with my father ... Mujib instigated an independence movement ... Mujib showed an obstinacy the logic of which to this day defies me." You feel like using words of one syllable to explain. Listen, dear child, the man had won, and it was your father who dug in his heels ... in the elections of 1970, the Awami League won an absolute majority of all seats in Pakistan's two "wings" combined. Mujib had every right to insist, "obstinately", on being Prime Minister, and it was Bhutto and General Yahya Khan who conspired to prevent this from happening. That was how the war of secession began, but you wouldn't know it from reading this book." (Reprinted in *Imaginary Homelands - Essays and Criticisms* by Salman Rushdie 1981-1991 ISBN: 0670838047).

¹⁰⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taslima_Nasrin

¹⁰⁵ *A Golden Age* by Tahmima Anam ISBN-13: 978-1847679765 <http://www.tahmima.com/agoldenage.html>

Followed up in 2011 with another Liberation war novel *The Good Muslim* ISBN-13: 978-1847679758

¹⁰⁶ *Scenes from early life* by Phillip Hensher (2012) ISBN-10: 0007433700

¹⁰⁷ eg; see this review by Bella Bathurst 29 April Guardian 2012

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/apr/29/scenes-early-life-philip-hensher-review>

Given the long shadow cast by 1971, it is no surprise that it dominates literary writings in English featuring Bangladesh. Arguably the best known exception to this tendency can be found in the works of Amitav Ghosh, the Indian author who spent much of his childhood in Bangladesh and wrote *The Hungry Tide*, an exciting tale of human and natural hazards in the Sundarbans, as experienced by a dolphin researcher.¹⁰⁸

In the UK, Bangladesh and Bangladeshis feature tangentially in two of the most acclaimed, bestselling novels about modern multicultural Britain published in the early part of the 21st century, Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*¹⁰⁹ and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*.¹¹⁰

Smith's hugely successful debut entertainingly spun a sprawling plot based on the interwoven lives of a mixed group of inner West London residents. Touching on similar territory to Hanif Kureishi's *Black Album*, the lives of the twin sons of one of the novels' central Bangladeshi characters, Majid and Millat, take divergent paths; while Majid is sent as a 10 year old to Bangladesh by the father in the hope of turning him into a better Muslim, he actually grows up to become an Anglicised atheist, whilst (of course) his UK raised twin brother ends up joining a fundamentalist Muslim sect.....

Ali's popular success *Brick Lane* deals more directly with Bangladesh; an intimate tale telling the story of a shy Bangladeshi woman whose arranged marriage causes her to emigrate to the famed street in East London, it describes how she grows in self confidence as she raises two daughters and is slowly drawn into a relationship with a young Bangladeshi Londoner who in contrast to her secular inclined daydreaming husband is a fierce fundamentalist....

My father escaped from East Pakistan, over the border to India. From there he finally got permission to join his wife in the UK. It was a temporary situation. When things got sorted out, we would go back. His children settled into school, we stopped speaking to him in Bengali and then we stopped even understanding. The new status quo was accepted. There was no plan, after that, to "go home". Sounding philosophical, my father would say: "I just got stuck here, that's all." And home, because it could never be reached, became mythical: Tagore's golden Bengal, a teasing counterpoint to our drab northern milltown lives. A glossy women's magazine that interviewed me recently ran its piece under the headline: "I turned my life into a book." This was interesting. I did not grow up like Nazneen (my protagonist) in a small Bangladeshi village, have an arranged marriage, and move to Tower Hamlets unable to speak a word of English. But since reading that headline I have been trying it on for size. How much of what I have written as fiction is drawn from experience? "Going Home Syndrome", as one of the characters in the book terms it, might be a fertile area to examine. Many of the characters in Brick Lane nurture their dreams of home, even (or perhaps especially) the young radical who was born in this country and has never even visited Bangladesh. I cannot draw any clear parallels with my family history. But I can feel the reverberations. It is not so much a question of what inspired me. The issue is one of resonance.

Monica Ali, *Where I'm coming from*, Guardian 17 June 2003¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ ISBN-10: 0007141785 <http://www.amitavghosh.com/bio.html>

¹⁰⁹ Zadie Smith (2000) ISBN-13: 978-0375703867; turned into a C4 television series in 2002
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0334877/>

¹¹⁰ Monica Ali (2003) ISBN-13: 978-0743243315; turned into a film Brick Lane (dir. Sarah Gavron) in 2007
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0940585/>

¹¹¹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2003/jun/17/artsfeatures.fiction>

For reasons which turned out to be a storm in a teacup, an unrepresentative but publicity savvy group self appointed 'community leaders' in took objection to filmmakers working to turn *Brick Lane* into a film when they were scouting locations in East London. Despite getting a lot of publicity (including what was taken at the time to be support for the censorious by renowned Australian feminist and British national treasure, Germaine Greer,) ¹¹² this did not prevent the film's successful release and critical acclaim.

As Greer notes in her article though, it was perhaps this sort of perceived community criticism against Ali, (for being a 'middle class outsider' setting her story in a real place) that underlay the reported refusal by a Bangladesh High Commission official to her of a visa to visit the country where she had been born (to a Bangladeshi father, who as Ali's own article notes on the previous page, was forced to flee with his family from the 1971 crackdown.) One variation of this tale, also disputed by the Bangladesh Foreign Ministry, is that Monica Ali was refused a visa because she had put 'journalist' on her visa application form. Either way of course, both reasons would appear to be examples of *shooting oneself in the foot* and provide another illustration of Bangladesh *failing to project* itself, by not encouraging an acclaimed writer with good family reasons to be supportive of Bangladesh.....

Happily, the above episode has not prevented more open minded Bangladeshis from hosting two successful Dhaka based offshoots of the legendary Hay literary festival ('Woodstock of the Mind' as Bill Clinton dubbed it,) starting in 2011. *Hay at Dhaka* was notable in 2012 for being based at the historic *Bangla Academy* ¹¹³ and having Vikram Seth, Tahmim Anam and Phillip Hensher among its many high profile speakers. ¹¹⁴

Whilst Bangladesh's history has inspired some interesting fictional works, it is of course also much discussed in non-fiction works, as noted with Mascherenas and Pilger already. Lawrence Lifschulz's *Unfinished Revolution* (1979) is a helpful companion to Mascherenas's *Legacy of Blood* and it and other interesting English language history books are referenced at a number of websites. ¹¹⁵

Development issues feature prominently among works about Bangladesh, with *A Quiet Violence: View from a Bangladesh Village* by Betsy Hartmann and James K. Boyce, written in 1983 providing a moving insight into the lives and experiences of ordinary villagers in the early years of post-war Bangladesh. ¹¹⁶ With the growth of microcredit and spread of communications technology, life in Bangladeshi villages will never be the same as the 1970s period described in *A Quiet Violence*, but nonetheless it remains a seminal work for development professionals. *Banker to the Poor* is Mohammad Yunus's 2003 autobiography ¹¹⁷ about the founding of Grameen Bank which was also discussed in

¹¹² <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2006/aug/05/bookscomment>

¹¹³ Which like its French counterpart is traditionally associated with nationalistically protecting the native language so arguably it is a sign of changing times that the Academy embraced Hay Dhaka 2012

¹¹⁴ See Hay Dhaka 2012 <http://www.hayfestival.com/dhaka/en-index.aspx?skinid=23> and

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/hay-festival/8909883/Bangladeshi-writers-turn-to-English-at-Hay-Dhaka.html>

¹¹⁵ Lifschulz (1979) ISBN-13: 978-0905762074 See list at <http://www.virtualbangladesh.com/history/bibliography.php>

¹¹⁶ ISBN-10: 0935028161 <http://www.betsyhartmann.org/non-fiction/a-quiet-violence.htm> Zed 1983 Germaine Greer's essay compilation *The Madwoman's Underclothes 1968-85*, ISBN 9780871133083 has an account of her trip to Bangladesh in 1972 to consider the situation of war time victims of rape – very much in the wake of the success of *Female Eunuch*.

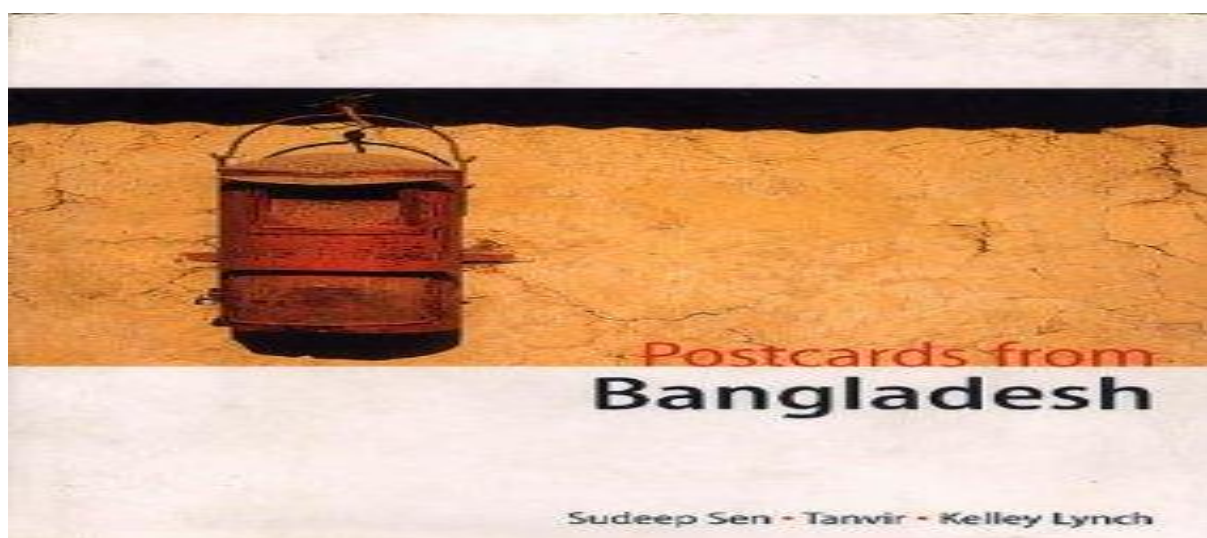
¹¹⁷ ISBN-13: 978-0786157921 <http://www.bankertothepoor.com/>

interesting detail in *The Price of a Dream: The Story of the Grameen Bank* by David Bornstein.¹¹⁸ Given the changing landscape caused by increasing urbanisation and industrialisation (to which Grameen via its highly successful and innovative telecoms venture has contributed,) both books deserve updating, not least because Grameen's success has since been more widely acknowledged around the world and the Bangladesh government has apparently targeted the Bank for criticism with a view to taking control of its mutually owned assets.¹¹⁹

The changing face of Bangladeshi villages and the controversy and hostility sometimes encountered by progressive NGOs is a theme illustrated with specific reference to the difficulties encountered by the *Proskika* organisation (under a different government) in the early noughties, in Jeremy Seabrook's *Freedom Unfinished: Fundamentalism and Popular Resistance in Bangladesh Today*.¹²⁰

From a different and unique perspective, James Novak, an American businessman familiar with the Bangladeshi elite over a generation from the 70s (and with a strong personal connection to the land, following the murder of his brother, a Catholic priest in an early 1960s riot within then East Pakistan,) wrote *Reflections on the Water* in 1993. Novak's book¹²¹ provides an absorbing and passionate account of Bangladesh's society and cultural influences.

As Novak and many others point out, Bangladesh's famed fertile soil and dramatic rivers have played a huge part in shaping its deep rooted tradition of festivals and fine arts, so there are some interesting books about Bangladesh's strong visual culture.¹²²



¹¹⁸ David Bornstein (1997) ISBN-13: 978-0226066448

¹¹⁹ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bob-harris/yunus-congress_b_3114171.html

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/30/opinion/sunday/kristof-women-hurting-women.html?_r=0

¹²⁰ J. Seabrook (2002) ISBN-13: 978-1856499088

¹²¹ Published 1993 by University Press Limited and Indiana Press Limited. ISBN-13: 978-0253341211

¹²² *Postcards from Bangladesh* by Sudeep Sen, Tanvir and Kelley Lynch. Published 2002 by University Press Limited is a good example of a Bangladeshi photography book. See also photographer Shaidul Alam's work with Drik and the famous 1943 Bengal famine paintings of Zainul Abedin. <http://www.bangladesh.com/art-galleries/drik/> Zainul Abedin <http://www.artofbengal.com/Bangladesh.htm>

Crowded as the country is, is overcrowding even its main problem? Hong Kong and Singapore both have greater population densities (14.315 and 12.347 per square mile, respectively) than Bangladesh, and they're called success stories. The same goes for Monaco. In fact, the whole Riviera is packed in August, and neither Malthus nor Ehrlich have complained about the topless beaches of St. Tropez. Fretting about overpopulation, is a perfect guilt-free—indeed, sanctimonious—way for "progressives" to be racists.

All the Trouble in the World: The Lighter Side of Famine, Pestilence, Destruction and Death: PJ O ROURKE 1995

ISBN-10: 0330331779 <http://www.theoiterer.org/ashton/year01/post1101.html>

"Clinton kept talking. It seemed he'd done reading for extra credit besides. And he was able to remember something from dorm bull sessions other than how to build a beer bong. He was a regular *Whole Earth Catalog* of political ideas: a health-care system with the infinite efficiency of a solar-powered wigwam; a reinvention of government as mind-blowingly original as the geodesic dome; the greening of America with an ecologically oriented national-service program that would make Woodstock look like merely a music concert in the mud. He explained. He gave examples. And he knew what he was talking about—until he talked about something I knew. I'd just been to Bangladesh, where I had toured the Grameen Bank, founded by the Third World development guru Muhammad Yunus. Clinton proposed using the Grameen's programs of microcredit and cooperative lending to fight poverty in American inner cities. The Grameen Bank lends \$30 or \$40 to groups of Bangladeshi village women so that they can buy pedal-operated sewing machines to make napkins, place mats, and decorative pillow cases to sell to tourists, in case Bangladesh ever gets any. I had a hard time picturing this in Compton or the South Bronx. Also, the crack fad was raging just then. Enormous drug deals were being transacted in the nation's slums. Was scarcity of capital really at the core of America's poverty problems? When Clinton finished talking about microcredit, I said, "I've just been to Bangladesh, where I toured the Grameen ..."

Was Clinton Cool? Talking about my generation. And talking and talking and talking by P. J. O'Rourke

<http://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/issues/2001/02/rourke.htm>

Whilst he characteristically used his experiences for humour reflecting his political views, the shadow of 1971 and jokes about George Harrison were to inform famed American satirist PJ O Rourke's interesting account of a trip to Bangladesh in the 1990s and his visit with Grameen bank (whose appeal is reflected by the fact that both PJ and the Clintons were interested in it,) in a chapter of 1995's *All the Trouble in the World*.

Likewise as the review below by cult writer and convicted cannabis smuggler Howard Marks lucidly illustrates, 1971 is never too far away in Western writings about Bangladesh. The veteran Guardian crime correspondent Duncan Campbell (husband of British screen icon Julie Christie) published an entertaining thriller in 2008 inspired by his experiences on the bygone hippy trail in 1971 – *The Paradise Trail* – which adds to its reflection of the Bangladesh war with a smart coda set in the present day.

The action in Duncan Campbell's debut novel, The Paradise Trail, begins during 1971, when the hippy trail was at its most worn and India and Pakistan temporarily upgraded their fierce rivalry on the cricket pitch to a state of war over the metamorphosis of East Pakistan into Bangladesh. The base of India's war operations was Calcutta, a city whose holy men eat and drink from freshly cleaned skulls while sitting cross-legged next to funeral pyres, and a firm favourite with hippies into hashish, hepatitis and hardcore Hinduism. The anglophile Indian proprietor of the Lux Hotel, a typical insect-infested hippy hangout, provides accommodation for the book's other principal characters. These are an English LSD casualty who speaks in Bob Dylan lyrics, an American dope smuggler, a Scottish public school dope-smoking advertising executive, a fanciable Californian photographer, a stuffy, career-obsessed, flirtatious English war reporter on his first assignment and a couple of Australian dingbats. Evidence suggests that one of the guests might be the ritualistic hippy serial killer who is known to be at large, and another a plain-clothes drug cop.....

Howard Marks reviewing *The Paradise Trail* a highly readable novel by Duncan Campbell, Guardian 29 March 2008¹²³

¹²³ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/mar/29/featuresreviews.guardianreview21> ISBN-13: 978-0755342457 2008

AS SEEN ON TV – FROM PILGER TO FRASIER

Real-life Labour MP (Member of Parliament) John Stonehouse faked his own apparent suicide in exactly the same way as Reginald Perrin¹²⁴ - in the summer of 1974 he left his clothes on a beach in Miami and disappeared. However this was pure coincidence: David Nobbs wrote his novel early in 1974, before Stonehouse disappeared (so Nobbs couldn't have based the novel on Stonehouse's disappearance) but the novel wasn't published until 1975, after Stonehouse went missing (so Stonehouse couldn't have got ideas for his disappearance by reading the novel).

By the time of his vanishing act in Florida in November 1974, Stonehouse had had debts of more than £800,000 after an attempt to set up a new investment bank in Bangladesh. He had also taken out a £170,000 insurance policy on his own life. The call to Melbourne police came shortly before Christmas Eve in 1974. Interpol had reason to believe Lord Lucan was in Australia and Melbourne's finest thought they had their man. Several days earlier, detectives in the Australian city had been alerted to the presence of a handsome, well-spoken but furtive Englishman who was shuttling large amounts of money into a bank account from abroad.

When police pounced on their target's luxury flat on Christmas Eve, what they found was not Lord Lucan but John Stonehouse, a 48-year-old British MP and former Labour minister, whose tale was just as captivating as that of the missing peer - and had unsettling implications for the British government.

Independent 29 September 2005

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/british-political-scandal-the-man-who-faked-his-death-520935.html>

As the above extract indicates, truth is often stranger than fiction. It would be unfair however to tarnish the genuine support for Bangladesh expressed by many notable personalities and politicians such as fellow Labour MP Peter Shore, with Stonehouse's fraudulent behaviour and notorious escape.

His link to Bangladesh however would not have been considered unusual at the time in the mid seventies as the country had a huge media profile in the first few years of its independence.

Frost/Mujib was followed by a wide range of correspondents and filmmakers making documentaries about the newly formed state's struggling early years. John Pilger in particular followed up his war time reporting with regular visits for British television.¹²⁵ These established an association with development and the aftermath of war for Pilger in the public mind – which was to give his acclaimed 1979 *Year Zero* documentary about Cambodia and Vietnam's overthrow of Pol Pot following his genocidal evacuation of the cities, huge viewing figures and inspire a Bangladesh style series of rock music benefit concerts¹²⁶ (which have been largely forgotten because of 1985's *Live Aid*)

Other UK television figures who visited Bangladesh in the early seventies included children's BBC Newsround presenter John Craven and a hard-hitting investigation of the 1974 famine by Jonathan Dimbleby.

¹²⁴ 1976-79 series <http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/fallandriseofreginaldperrin/>
<http://www.imdb.co.uk/title/tt0073990/trivia>

¹²⁵ eg: <http://johnpilger.com/videos/an-unfashionable-tragedy>

¹²⁶ Featuring contemporary New Wave acts as well as the key rock royalty missing from Madison Square Gardens in 71 (Plant/McCartney/The Who) – and also roped in Abba with a best selling single for UNICEF
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concerts_for_the_People_of_Kampuchea

In more recent years, Bangladesh has begun to feature in a number of travelogues. Michael Palin, the famed Python and the BBC's world traveller of choice since his *Around the World in Eighty Days*, wrote extensively about his stay in Bangladesh for *Bhutan to the Bay of Bengal* the final episode of his *Himalaya* series.¹²⁷ Another notable travel programme was the final episode of *Rick Stein's Far Eastern Odyssey*, in which the acclaimed tv chef spent an hour reflecting on the British love of curry during a diverse tour of Bangladesh's culinary culture.¹²⁸ Nature and wildlife have also featured Bangladesh in documentaries notably:

- Swamp Tigers (the Bengal Tiger in the enchanted Sunderbans)¹²⁹
- BBC Ganges episode 3 Waterland¹³⁰

The world of satellite television and reality tv satellite globalisation has also spawned a distinctly non-stereotypical Bangladeshi born tv star in the eccentric car designer, Nizamuddin "Leepu" Awlia's expletive happy '*Chop Shop*'¹³¹ collaborations with Cockney mechanic Bernie Fineman.

(SOMEWHERE IN SEATTLE, EARLY MILLENNIUM)

Nanette appears in the back seat next to Diane, strumming her guitar. She has arrived directly from the late '60's/early '70's and is a stereotypical hippie/flower child.

Nanette: Do you remember that song?

Frasier: [horried] Apparently, I do.

Nanette: He composed it in college. It's how we met. He wrote it as a poem and was reciting it one night at the Human Collective when I joined in with my guitar. Would you like to hear it?

Frasier: NO!!

Lilith/Diane: Oh, yes!/Yes, please!

Nanette: It's called "Bangladesh: Dhaka before the dawn." [She begins to sing.] "I dreamt that I was riding a candy unicorn / As I went to meet my lady in the dewdrop crystal morn..."

Frasier begins to mouth the words. He curls his lip in disgust.

Frasier: The **Bangladesh** part's coming.

Nanette continues to strum the guitar. FADE OUT.
End of Act 3

[N.B. Since Bangladesh gained independence from Pakistan in 1971, this must be roughly when Frasier and Nanette met, which seems right based on Frasier's current age. *Transcript and comment from:*

http://www.kacl780.net/frasier/transcripts/season_9/episode_2/don_juan_in_hell_2.html

'Don Juan in Hell' Frasier series 9 episode 2 2001

¹²⁷ See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0074qsf> and <http://www.palinstravels.co.uk/book-3942>

¹²⁸ Rick Stein, BBC (2009) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00m9ysc> Incidentally the great British love of curry provided a *deus ex machina* happy ending plot device ending to *The Other One*, a 1977 BBC sitcom starring Richard Briers and Michael Gambon, in which the career of the salesman hero played by Briers, at the height of his *Good Life* fame, was rescued by a impromptu flight to Dacca resulting in a large order from a British Bangladeshi UK owner of Indian restaurants <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0075553/>

¹²⁹ <http://www.amazon.com/Swamp-Tigers-Book-DVD-Video/dp/B000SOEZ5Y>

¹³⁰ See Ganges 2009 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b007wjwz> and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ganges_\(BBC_TV_series\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ganges_(BBC_TV_series))

¹³¹ In which the cheerfully foul mouthed pair team attempt to build a supercar in a mere matter of weeks out of an automobile which they generally obtain from a wrecking yard. Originated with *Bangla Bangers* episodes filmed in Dhaka, but since transferred to near the heart of the British Bangladeshi community in East London http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bangla_Bangers and <http://thetvdb.com/?tab=series&id=83755>

ON FILM – MY ARCHITECT AND TAREQUE MASUD (RIP)

*“It has been many decades since south-Asian arthouse cinema has been fashionable; now it's the movies from Iran, Latin America and the Far East that get talked about, and Satyajit Ray's work doesn't dominate the Top 10 lists the way it used to. Maybe *The Clay Bird* will reverse that - inspired, as it clearly and unapologetically is, by Ray. And it's not going too far to say that it has much of the ease, the visual rapture and sheer unforced naturalness of Ray's great picture *Pather Panchali*.”*

Peter Bradshaw, reviewing Tareque Masud's *Matir Moina* ('Clay Bird') Guardian 4 July 2003
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2003/jul/04/artsfeatures>

In a short but fruitful career tragically curtailed by a car crash in 2011 on Bangladesh's notoriously dangerous roads, the late Tareque Masud achieved worldwide acclaim for the engaging works of film and documentary he created in collaboration with his American born wife Catherine.¹³²

*Matir Moina*¹³³ forms his most successful masterpiece, based in part on the directors own childhood growing up in rural Bangladesh during the war of Independence. A must see if ever there was one and highly acclaimed by critics and viewers around the world as the above quote attests.

The Masud's first came to prominence in Bangladesh with a remarkable documentary *Muktir Gaan* (Songs of Freedom)¹³⁴ about a group of musicians associated with *Chhayanat*, a Bengali Dcultural organisation in Dhaka, performing to displaced villagers and refugees during the 1971 war. Weaving footage shot and left unreleased by American documentary maker Lear Levin, the film weaves the story of the Liberation war with film of the musicians singing in and outside occupied Bangladesh – it shared with the near contemporaneous *When We Were Kings* about Mohammad Ali's Rumble in the Jungle, the achievement of constructing a thought provoking documentary feature in the mid 90s from footage lost or overlooked since the 70s.

Despite like other Bangladeshi filmmakers having to overcome funding issues and the occasional censorship attempt, Tareque Masud won both critical acclaim abroad and public affection for his films at home, including for *Ontarjatra* (*The Journey*)¹³⁵, an evocative homecoming journey taken by a divorced British Bangladeshi mother and her son to their native Sylhet home following her former husband's death.

Despite a flourishing contemporary Bengali television drama culture willing to tackle controversial subjects on Bangladesh's many television stations, censorship remains a challenge for the Bangladesh film industry which already faces huge commercial pressures from readily available pirate DVDs (Hollywood and Bollywood) and satellite television. Curiously, given its high profile *Digital Bangladesh* initiative and default

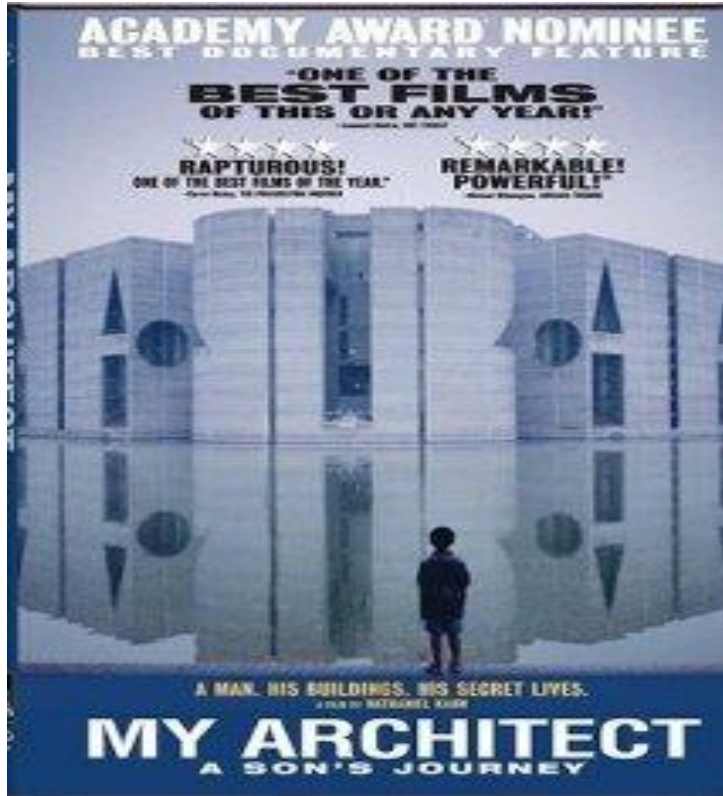
¹³² <http://tarequemasud.org/>

¹³³ (2003) <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0319836/>

¹³⁴ (1995) <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0325853/>

¹³⁵ (2006) <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0474548/>

secular stance, the Bangladesh government still occasionally censors YouTube (as popular in Bangladesh as anywhere else) on the grounds of offence to religious sensibilities.¹³⁶ *Ironic when you take into account the half Bangladeshi heritage of one of YouTube's founders, the German born Jawed Karim.*¹³⁷



My Architect, A Son's Journey.

Directed in 2003 by Nathaniel Khan. Much praised documentary detailing Nathaniel Khan's search for the soul of his late father, legendary international architect Louis Khan.

Includes rare footage inside Bangladesh's iconic National Assembly building.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0373175/>

SEE ALSO THESE REVIEWS

http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2003/11/hop_on_pop.html

http://film.guardian.co.uk/News_Story/Critic_Review/Guardian_Film_of_the_week/0,4267,1281602,00.html

'Jonathan is not being sent to Bangladesh'.

- Why not?

'Because we still care about Bangladesh'

Jack Nicholson answering the question there in a dig about a Ambassador with whose wife his character is having an affair.

- words scripted by the late Nora Ephron in *Heartburn*, a 1986 American drama directed by Mike Nichols starring Meryl Streep, Jack Nicholson, Stockard Channing, Jeff Daniels and Miloš Forman. Based on her semi-autobiographical novel of the same name, inspired by her tempestuous second marriage to Carl Bernstein (of Woodward & Bernstein Watergate v Nixon fame *natch*) and his affair with Margaret (now Baroness) Jay, wife of the then British Ambassador to Washington, Peter Jay, (the hapless Jonathan of this piece) whose personal life was the object of prurient amusement for *Private Eye* readers in the 70s/80s¹³⁸

¹³⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/UnblockYouTubeInBangladesh>

¹³⁷ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jawed_Karim Not to mention Bangladeshis (the singer of the backing track who is singing a Tagore poem) featuring significantly in this pre Gangnam style viral sensation [Where the Hell is Matt? 2008 - YouTube](#)

¹³⁸ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heartburn_\(film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heartburn_(film))

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- ❖ *I ME MINE* by George Harrison - Genesis publications (1980) Ganga Publishing Simon Schuster ISBN 0-671-42787-3
- ❖ *The Playboy Interviews With John Lennon and Yoko Ono (1980)*, David Sheff ISBN, 1429958081, 9781429958080 .
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Bangladesh is the most densely populated (non City state) country in the world, with 160million people living in an area the size of England and Wales. Population density is nearly 1100 people per square kilometre (km²).

[EU average - 116 per km², South Korea - 487 per km²]

Dhaka (Capital/Largest city: population 11million), Chittagong (Main seaport: 2.5m), Khulna (Industrial/nr Mongla port : 1.1m)

Bangladesh became an independent country in 1971. Part of the ancient ethno-linguistic region of Bangla/Bengal, it was ruled as part of Bengal in British India for nearly 200 years and from 1947-71 was the eastern wing of Pakistan. Constitutionally it is a secular, parliamentary democracy and unitary state. Bangladesh's legal system is based on English Common law and it is a signatory to most United Nations and ILO conventions It is a member of the Commonwealth, SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation), the ASEAN Regional Forum, Bay of Bengal Initiative BIMSTEC and Organization of Islamic Co-operation (OIC)

Capital and largest city	Dhaka  23°42'N 90°21'E
Official languages	Bangla
Ethnic groups (1998 ^[1])	98% Bengali 2% other
- Current constitution	4 November 1972 ^[1]
Area/Population	
- Total	147,570 km ² (94th) 56,977 sq mi
- Water (%)	6.4
- July 2012 estimate	161,083,804 ^[4] (8th)
- Density	1,033.5/km ² (9th) 2,676.8/sq mi
GDP (PPP)	2011 estimate
- Total	\$282.229 billion ^[4] (44)
- Per capita	\$1,909.461(2011 est) ^[4] (155)
GDP (nominal)	2011 estimate
- Total	\$113.855 billion ^[4] (59)
- Per capita	\$700.59 ^[4]
Gini (2005)	33.2 ^[5] medium
HDI (2013)	 0.515 ^[6] low · 146th
Currency	Taka (BDT)
Time zone	BST (UTC+6)
Drives on the	left
Calling code	880

BACK COVER

Breaking Ships in Bangladesh - images of the the major shipbreaking and recycling industry sustained by the Chittagong port area in Bangladesh. Inherently controversial because of its obvious safety and environmental risks – it is also both a supplier of raw materials for the national economy *and a key link in the global logistics chain benefiting all global consumers by keeping costs down for global shipowners.....*



Ship breakers on the Bay of Bengal, near Chittagong, Bangladesh Corbis images 2012